NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

ONE - ACT PLAYS 1

Translated with an Introduction

By

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General Egyptian Book Organization
1989

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NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

***ONE-ACT PLAYS* (1)**

General Editor

M. M. Enani

- *THE LEGACY*
- *THE RESCUE*
- *THE MOUNTAIN*
- *DEATH AND RESURRECTION*

INTRODUCTION

In spite of his almost single-minded dedication to the art of fiction, Nobel-Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz has made some forays into the world of drama. In 1969 he puplished a collection of short stories entitled *Under the Umbrella* which included five one-act plays, his first, namely *Death and Resurrection, The Legacy, The Rescue, A Draft Proposal,* and *The Task*. The first three were produced for the stage in the same year by director Ahmad Abdul Halim with a strong cast which included such magnificient actors as Sanaa Gamil, Galal al-Sharqawi, and Aida Abdul Aziz. The combination of Mahfouz's distinguished literary reputation, which had slowly but firmly built up since the forties, and that star-studded cast proved immensely successful with the public ; the triple-bill production ran for two months (a substantial run by Egyptian standards in those days) at 'Al-Hakim Theatre', currently called 'Mohamed Farid Theatre'.

Success with the public, however, does not always guarantee good notices. The critical reception of the pro-

duction did not match the enthusiasm of the audience, and tended to be rather lukewarm . Indeed, some critics went so far as to dismiss the plays as intellectual exercises or debates in dramatic form (they had done that earlier with Tawfik al-Hakim), and were amazingly blind to the intrinsic "theatricality" of the pieces which comes across quite vividly even in the reading. One exception was the eminent drama critic Fouad Dawwarah who defended the plays against the charge of being stories in dialogue or dialogic pieces. Was it the classical Arabic of the dialogue together with the in-built symbolism and ambiguity of the plays which put the critics off at a time when socialist realism was the vogue and the stage went all out for the vernacular, regarding itself primarily as a political forum ? * Was it the fault of the director, perhaps ? Could it be that he was awed by Mahfouz's reputation, and the classical Arabic, and therefore failed to bring out the essential comical absurdity which underlies the situation in all three plays ? Were the actors, possibly, carried away by the classical Arabic, and declaimed in the grand style ? I remember seeing Beckett's *End Game* performed as a tragedy in classical Arabic, and indeed, delivered as one at the 'Pocket Theatre' in Cairo in 1962 ; it was only years later, when I saw it in England that I discovered it was a hilarious comedy. despite the black existential despair !

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* Some of Al-Hakim's classical Arabic Plays, however, like *The Sultan's Dilemma* and *O, Tree-Climber* ! and Alfred Farag's Classical Arabic Comedies received wide critical acclaim.

The realistic setting in *The Legacy* and *The Rescue* is very tricky and quite misleading ; the familiarity and ordinariness are there only to be exploded. Were they exploded in the production ? I was in England at the time, and do not qualify as an eye-witness. I have, therefore, talked to lots of people, and tried to jog their memories. But everyone remembers only the bit that concerns him or her. The actors remember the enthusiastic audience, and will not simply admit that anything was wrong with the production : 'the critics were simply pig-headed. You know what critics are like, don't you ?' The critics, on the other hand are either dead or departed or retired, or too self-assured to even question their former judgement . Only one critic, and a dear friend, Samy Khashaba, had the decency and modesty to admit that, perhaps, they were wrong, and possibly, a little bit too niggly at the time.

But whatever the reasons were, the critical reception was far from encouraging, and the unfavourable view of Mahfouz as playwright has persisted ever since. I meet students today, in 1988, at the Theatre Institute who tell me, and quite confidently too, that Mahfouz is no playwright. I ask, quite innocently, "what have you read ?" And the answer is : "it's a well-known fact." I was talking to Samir al-Asfouri the other day, one of our most talented and ingenious directors, and the head of the Avant-garde theatre in Cairo and he told me that he was adapting one of Mahfouz's novels for the stage, the 1985 *The Day the Leader was Killed.* I asked him, "why don't you do one of his plays ? You're very fond of Ionesco,

aren'l you ?". (He had given us a few years ago a wonderful Ionesco evening entitled *The Bald Primadonnà Will Always Remain Bald*) "What about *The Chase* ?" I added. But he had not heard of *The Chase*, and "anyway, he is not much of a playwright. He is more dramatic in his novels." When I told him I was doing Mahfouz's eight plays into English, his total dramatic output to date, because (he had exclaimed in total dismay "why ? !") I happened, apart from all critical jargon, to like them and to think they were superb 'theatre', he said, "you'd better do *A Tale Without Beginning or End*. It is much more dramatic than all his plays. Practically all in dialogue. Besides, it explains quite clearly his attitude to Camp David'.' I replied, "doesn't *Death and Resurrection* do that even before Camp David ?" He said, "come to think of it, you're right. I had quite forgotten." (Some of Mahfouz's novels were successfully adapted for the stage in the sixties. Is the current tendency a hangover ?)

Another friend of mine, director, playwright, and dramaturg, Mahdi al-Hussayni, told me that he had suggested to al-Asfouri Mahfouz's last play *The Devil Turns Preacher* or *The Copper City*, as it is subtitled — 'The Copper City' being the title of the tale in *The One Thousand and One Nights* on which the play was based. Al-Asfouri had demurred ; "you would need to have a budget of at least fifty thousand," he had finally said, dismissing the idea. A small regional troupe in Upper Egypt is currently rehearsing the play with next to no budget !

Undeterred by critics and producers Mahfouz went on to write three more one-act plays : *The Chase*, publish-

ed in the short stories collection *Crime* (1973), *The Mountain* and *The Devil Turns Preacher* in a collection of short stories bearing the title of the last play (1979). The eight plays divided themselves evenly and neatly into two slim volumes, each containing four. I was tempted to stick to the *Under the Umbrella* plays in the first volume, but changed my mind at the last minute, including *The Mountain*, rather than either *The Task* or *Draft Proposal*. The question of the size of the volumes had something to do with the decision of course. A more important factor, however, was that *The Mountain* seemed to align itself thematically more with *Death and Resurrection* than either *The Task* or *Draft Proposal*, presenting itself as a historical hindsight, or, rather, an explanatory political prefatory or foot-note to the earlier play.

Death and Resurrection was written in the aftermath of the 1967 war with Israel, referred to sometimes as defeat, sometimes as 'setback' in the political jargon of the media. The Giant is a transparent symbol of the U.S.A., or, simply, the Western powers; the aggressive mocker in the wings is an embarrassingly obvious theatrical objectification of Israel, the 'Plague' is a metaphor in the tradition of Camus's *La Peste* of Nasser's dictatorship, with Nasser himself as the ironically doubtful benevolent dictator — the new head of the institution from which the Tiresias-like blind beggar escapes, sacrificing security and comfort for freedom :

Beggar : It so happened that in my wanderings I came across some government officials who led me back to the institution and put me there once more.

Man : They delivered you back to the monster

Beggar : No. A new head had replaced him. He was honest, just, and kind ...

Man : How come you left it then ?

Beggar : I bolted.

Man : Incredible.

Beggar : You see, it's true he was honest, fair, and kind, but he was also too damned fond of discipline. Almost an obsession with him. And he enformed it with near astronomical precision. and no questions asked.

Man : But you enjoyed the food, the clothes, the comfort, and the cleanliness.

Beggar : You ate according to schedule, drank according to schedule, went to the toilet, begging your pardon, according to schedule, and slept according to schedule. I nearly went mad.

Man : And so you rebelled once more.

Beggar : Even the luxury of rebelling was denied me, for how could I rebel against an honest, just, and kind man ? My conscience wouldn't let me.

Man : You should have been contented with your lot.

Beggar : Even when revolting was denied me ?

Man : Revolting for its own sake is not particularly a good thing.

Beggar : It's better than being a stone anyway.

Man : And so you ran away.

Beggar : And so I ran away.

Man : To the dust, the insects, and the rotten morsel.

Beggar : to my true happiness.

The Mountain takes us to the beginning of the story, to the roots of all revolutionary dictatorships in the idea or concept of elitism. Five young men set up what amounts to a revolutionary command council in a cave at the top of The Muqattam mountain, complete with a list of the enemies of the people, whom they go about liquidating. The violence is grotesquely portrayed, with a tinge of hysteria and black humour, and the play almost tips, but not quite, into the melodramatic. As such. the two plays constitute one continuous unit, just as *The Legacy* and *The Rescue,* with their anoymous Man and Woman, and realistic settings form another.

...*The Legacy* revolves round a theme, or, rather, a two-fold dialectic that has obsessed Mahfouz throughout his career, namely the conflict between religion and scientific progress, on the one hand, and the past and the future, on the other. The story of the prodigal son is here ironically inverted. and rather than the fatted calf he gets a 'fatted' contractor and business man, and a detective Ionesco-style. The 'Wali' or holy man exits carrying a huge question mark (a miracle-worker ? A charlatan ?), and the old house, the inheritance, or the cultural and religious heritage symbolically, is replaced by a factory of electronic equipments.

Mystery and suspense equally underlie the construction of *The Rescue,* a play that ironically contradicts its very title. It begins with one big question — who is the woman, and what has she done to send the state security after her in such force ? — and ends with the same question having grown bigger and hatched several other questions. The grotesque mixture of obscenity, violence. black despair and comedy occurs once more in this play. as in *The Legacy,* with sex as an added bonus. Ambiguity, however, remains the structuring principle, so that the more we seem to discover about the two principal characters, and the more intimately we get to know them, the more vexingly mysterious they become. When death comes at the end, the absurdity or sense of futility is quite intolerable, and the heroism explodes with a hollow bang which is grotesquely funny.

In all the four plays which make up this volume, and indeed, in all his plays, Mahfouz does not stick to one dramatic style, but opts, rather, for artistic eclecticism. *Death and Resurrection* is allegorical and expressionistic in its general character, a parable where the symbolism thins out in places almost to a fault. However, it makes use of other styles, suggesting Ionesco and Camus in the episodes of the Doctor and the blind Beggar, ending in a manner typical of the Agitprop theatre, and opening with the hero flung backward on stage from one of the wings in the exact manner of Beckett's hero in *Act Without Words I.*

The Legacy and *The Rescue* are almost realistic T.V.

thrillers with a strong dose of the absurd and the incomprehensible in the Pinteresque tradition. *The Mountain* has an element of harrowing violence engendered not only by the brutal murders, but also by the ruthless brevity of the scenes and their breathlessly quick pace and relentless succession. This pattern imparts to the quasi-realistic setting an oppressively sinister and claustrophobic atmosphere, transforming the scathing critique of moral and political elitism into an existential hell in the mode of Sartre.

The other plays, which will be shortly available to the English reader in translation, are equally varied and eclectic. *The Chase* is almost a purely absurdist drama with unmistakable overtones from Ionesco's *The Killer*, and faint echoes from the same writer's *Jacques* and *The Future is in Eggs*. *The Copper City, or The Devil Turns Preacher* is a panoramic historical phantasia with a parabolic element and with time as the chief protagonist, as it was in *The Chase*. It would require, in my view, a method of production close to Vakhtangov's concept of 'fantastic reality'. *The Task* begins in the realistic vein of a thriller, with a chase and another mysterious pursuer, and switches to pure expressionism halfway as the relentless pursuer begins to cast a sinister shadow reminiscent, once more, of Ionesco's 'Killer'. *A Draft Proposal*, on the other hand, is realistic from beginning to end, with elements of farce (the slapstick fight scene) and melodrama (the pining, unrequieted love element). It is a strong dramatic invective in the burlesque tradition

against the commercialism of the modern theatre and its star-system.

It is a well-known fact that Mahfouz has read deeply into world, and, particularly Western fiction — Proust, Joyce, Dickens. Balzac, Zola, Hardy you name it. What his plays reveal is that he must have read equally deeply into world drama, and especially modern drama. But apart from the question of readings and influences which needs to be separately and methodically studied and documented, the plays reveal a lively dramatic mind, a rich visual and auditory imagination, a keen sense of the special nature of dramatic writing, and a deep awareness of the resources of the stage. Setting, movement, visual and sound effects play an important part in shaping the situation, the dramatic action and significance of those plays, and work hand in hand with the dialogue, or the spoken word. Indeed, only a confident and daring playwright could have taken the traditional 'blackout' and put it to such effective theatrical use. In The Legacy, a whole sequence is conducted in total darkness with only the voices of the two actors, interspersed with silences, the sound of whimpering, and two screams at work. It is as though Mahfouz was drawing on the resources of radio drama to communicate to the audience the atmosphere of the ancient haunted house, and the woman's terror and anxiety.

The dialogue itself, though in the neutrally remote classical Arabic — a deliberate ruse to distance the dramatic situation from every-day reality and its humdrum

patterns and familiar types — is invariably shot through with flashes of wit and comedy, and preppered over with colloquial images and expressions. The result is a crisp dramatic dialogue, vivid, economical, and fast-moving. Indeed, in several instances, Mahfouz ingeniously manipulates classical Arabic to give the sound, intonation, rhythm, and effect of the vernacular, i.e. of everyday speech, while preserving its formal character. Professor M. Enani has written an informative analytical study of this point in an essay on the development of the language of fiction in Egypt entitled 'Novel Rhetoric'. It will be published shortly by the Egyptian Book Organization in a book on Mahfouz called *Egyptian Perspectives*, and I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in the subject. In the present limited context, however, one or two examples from *The Legacy* will suffice to illustrate the point. Listen to the Detective blackmailing the Man with two questions that depend wholly for their meaning on the colloquial intonation, since they include neither verbs nor interrogative articles :

Detective : And the case and its costs ? ... And the money going into custoday and possbily getting lost ?

In the translation I have added 'What about' at the beginning of the first question, but it does not exist in the original. A line later we find the Detective repeating the same structure, only with fewer words : his line literally translates:

Detective : Lawyers fees ? Financial liabilities ? your imprisonment ?

I have rendered it as follows to focus the intent :

Detective : There will be lawyers' fees'. All sorts of fees. Prison, possibly ?

However, neither the crispness of the dialogue with its occasional flashes of humour, nor the hilarious oddness of some of the incidents and characters — a harlot and a pimp in the house of a holy man in *The Legacy*, a runaway woman in the flat of a strange batchelor in *The Rescue*, a giant, an insolent beggar and a crazy doctor in *Death and Resurrection*, dirty old man seeking orgies and getting cudgelled to death in *The Mountain*, a sinister voyeur or'Peeping Tom' in *The Task*, a woman accepting bigamy to help Mr. Red and Mr. White elude their pursuer in *The Chase*, a spell-bound city, thousands of years old, with an evil sleeping beauty for a queen, a bottled 'efreet' or 'jinni' at the bottom of a lake, and a trip reminiscent of that in *Time-Machine* in *The Devil Turns Preacher*, and a pompous critic and an insipid interviewer in *A Draft Proposal* — neither the oddness nor the humour succeeds in dispelling the air of sinister gloom which envelops the plays. The sense of absurdity which Albert Camus so eloquently described lies. in various degrees, at the heart existence as they portray it. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in Justin O'Brien's translation (New York, Knopf, 1955) Camus says :

"A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights,

man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity."

The world of *The Legacy, The Rescue, The Lask,* and *The Chase* or *The Mountain,* perhaps to a lesser degree, is riddled with mystery, and cannot be explained realistically and rationally by either good or bad reasons ; it raises questions which are never answered, expectations which are never fulfilled, leaving us in the end with characters who are only identifiable and definable by their anguish, despair and utter perplexity. And even in *Death and Resurrecion,* which is obviously militant, *The Devil Turns Preacher,* which is cautionary (a warning against Sadat's incipient autocracy, and *A Draft Proposal,* one glimpses behind the direct political implications and the hero's defiant fiery rhetoric in the first, in the treatment of time, and lost chances in the second, and in the author's proposed unheroic play in the last traces of this existential sadness and sense of futility. For in these plays Mahfouz was dramatizing not only his own persistent dilemmas and preoccupations, but the consciousness of a whole people, the emotional and intellectual turmoil of a period of national crisis when the Nasser myth exploded, and the Egyptian dream lay in ruins. After the defeat, there came the trials, with their shattering revelations : the idols fell, one after the other; the past was a fraud, and the future, with the idols all fallen, and Israel nearer Cairo than ever, held very little

promise indeed. The plays, if they are anything at all, are a symbolic rendition in dramatic terms of the frustration, the dazed bewilderment, the sense of shock and collapse, of a paradise lost, which marked the consciousness of this period. In those black days, 'divested of illusions and lights,' every Egyptian, whatever his class, or walk of life, felt an alient, a stranger, a redundant actor divorced from his setting. Neither self nor history made sense. Our exile seemed, at the time, quite 'without remedy.'

In his novels, Mahfouz has immortalized a city, Cairo, and documented the development of the consciousness of a whole nation. In his plays too, he acts as the historian of consciousness.

Nehad Selaiha
Cairo, 1988



THE LEGACY

(A waiting-room in the house of a holy man. The room has an old-world look. In the centre of the wall facing us stands an ancient console with a door on each side. The other sides are lined with couches and chairs. The walls are covered in certain places with patterned straw mats.

A young couple enter. They look around curiously and examine the room as if they are seing it for the first time, then stand in the middle.)

Man : The house is so silent, like a graveyard.

Woman : Clap your hands to let them know you're here.

Man : He doesn't like that. I still remember what he's like. (Pause.)

Woman : It's such an old house ; the alleys leading to it seem to have been carved in the days of Noah.

Man : You sound like a tourist when you speak of those alleys. Have you forgotten your origins ?

Woman : Don't be rude. We're supposed to behave like a decent couple. (Pause.)

Man : *I* wonder why he asked me to come.

Woman : He's your father whatever happens.

Man : I thought the past was over and done with.

Woman : The present passes away, and the past comes back. A sinful man, like yourself, should never give up hope. Indeed, any sin can be forgiven if the sinner happens.
to be a man.

Man : Have you ever wished that your father would call you and give you his forgiveness ?

Woman : Had he seen me in his last hour, he would have wrestled with death itself in order to have the pleasure of killing me.

(The Man smiles. A short pause.)

Man : I wonder why he asked me to come after all this time.

Woman : You are his only son. He missed you. His heart has softened and who knows ? Perhaps you will ...

Man : What ?

Woman : Go away from here with full honours, carrying a fortune you never dreamt of.

Man **: He sent me away when I was only a lad, without so much as a penny in my pocket.**

Woman : What did you expect after your disgraceful behaviour ?

Man : I was homeless and hungry for a long time; it was only ...

Woman : ... your depravity that saved you from starvation ?

Man : I shall cut your tongue for you, you cursed devil.

Woman : But since you are a man, all your sins are forgiven.

Man : And since you are a woman, you are the origin of every sin.

Woman : You're nothing but a worthless beggar. But you can terrorize the devil himself.

Man : Can't we keep a decent tongue even for one hour ?

Woman : To fool the old man ?

Man : You have to play your part well, and behave like a wife.

Woman : You would have done better to come alone and leave me in peace.

Man : I thought it wiser to come as a respectable married man.

People are always suspicious of bachelors.

Woman : Perhaps he knows about you already more than you think.

Man : If he did, he wouldn't have put that ad in the papers asking me to come home.

Woman : Odd that a man of God could not discover that you were a bar-owner and a dirty adventurer.

Man : He's better than your dear departed father anyway. He's never been a jail-bird.

Woman : Don't make me take off my shoes in this ancient blessed room, and beat you with them.

Man : Go right ahead, and I'll beat your brains out with them. This will prove to everybody that we are

really married.

(Pause.)

Woman : Ah ! If only that dream of weath would come true !

Man : ... The small bar will become a world-renowned night club !

Woman : ... And the small time adventurer will become an international pimp !

(He clenches his fist and raises it threateningly. She retreats a step laughing under her breath.)

Woman : But seriously, did you know that your father enjoyed such a wonderful reputation ?

Man : Yes.

Woman : Every time we asked for directions to the house, people praised him to high heaven.

Man : The people around here are very kind, and simple.

Woman : They insist he's a miracle-worker.

Man : They think a conjurer is a miracle-worker.

Woman : They also talk of the sense of peace he inspires in people.

Man : They all come here and make donations quite willingly.

Woman : Perhaps they do it because they take away something more valuable.

Man : There's still a place for superstition in your heart, even though it's overstuffed with flagrant evil.

Woman : You're a fine one to talk ! What about you ? Don't you remember the day you had that renal pain ?

Man : Stop babbling. The old man must be a millionaire by now.

Woman : Pray God it's true.

Man : Here, in this place, there is a fortune.

Woman : In the house ?

Man : Holy people don't deal with banks.

Woman : So when his time is up you can spirit away the legacy before the tax people can get their hands on it.

Man : There's a more serious threat than the tax people.

Woman : What do you mean ?

Man : I mean those who serve him.

Woman : Do holy men have servants ?

Man : Yes. devils all of them.

Woman : *Do* you really mean that ?

Man : I was referring to the devils of this earth.

Woman : Luckily you are one yourself. You can easily deal with them. Do you have a step-mother ?

Man : She's been dead for years.

Woman : Is he very old ?

Man : Very.

Woman : That is good.

Man : Stop dreaming. He has outlived whole generations, and is still active.

Woman : I can't bear this suspense any longer. You have to go and find him.

Man : No. We have to wait. I know what he's like.

(Pause. They walk up and down. The door on the left opens, and a boy carrying a brazier walks in. He is good-looking, wears a long loose gown (a'Galabiyyah'), a close-fitting Cap (or 'Taqiyyah'), and red-leather slippers on his feet. He goes round the room silently burning incense, completely oblivious of the Man and Woman. They stand side by side watching him.)

Man : Listen you !

(The boy stops going round and stands facing them.)

Man : Are you the Sheikh's servant ?

Boy : All people are his servants.

Man : What are you then ?

Boy : I am the servant of the house.

Man : I am the son of your lord.

Boy : I know that sir.

Man : How did you recognize me ?

(The Boy does not answer.)

Man : Why don't you answer me ?

Boy : I did, sir.

Man (smiling) :

All right. I was invited to come.

Boy : I know that sir.

Man : Do you know when he will see me :

Boy : My lord has asked me to tell you ...

Man (interrupting) :
What I am asking is, when will he see me ?

Boy : He's gone.

Man : Where ? When ?

Boy : He left the house after the dawn prayers.

Man : When does he come back ?

Boy : He will never come back.

Man : You're talking nonsense. boy.

Boy : God forgive you sir.

Man : And why won't he come back ?

Boy (benaing his head in sorrow)
He's gone to meet his creator.

Woman (startled) : ......
What do you mean. little boy ?

Boy : He said he felt his hour was near, and went.

Man : Why didn't he stay in bed ?

Boy : A long time ago he vowed to meet his God out in the open.

Man : But you know where he is, don't you ?

Boy : No.

Man : Why did he ask me to come then ?

Boy : He wanted you to come home, to the old house.

Man : Did he give you a message for me ?

Boy : He said : My hour has come .It's time I invited my prodigal son to come back home. Perhaps he will prove worthy of my legacy.

Man : His legacy ? !

Boy : He ordered me to hand the legacy over to you, and hoped it would help you to recover your senses.

Man : God have mercy on his soul ... I mean God give him long life.

Woman : And where is that legacy my good boy ?

Boy : He said : He will come in sinfulness and darkness accompanied by an evil woman.
(The Man and Woman look at each other silently.)

Woman : This means that she too would need a share of his legacy to save her soul.

Man : When do we receive the legacy ?
(The Boy points to a mat on the wall on the right side of the console).

Boy : It is kept in a safe behind this mat, and here is the key.
(The Man takes the key and goes towards the mat. The Boy makes to leave the room. The woman rushes at him and holds him firmly by the hand).

Woman : You stay here until we get hold of the legacy.
(The Man removes the mat and opens the safe. He takes out several old yellow books, occasionally reading out some of the titles as he stacks them in a pile on one of the couches.)

Man : Truth ... The Ranks and Pathways of the Spirit ... Peace of Mind . .
(Takes out more and more books until the couch is covered and piled over with them, and some fall to the ground.

Man : Where is the legacy ?

Woman : *(to the Boy).*
You stole it.

Boy : God forgive you.

Man (taking out more books)
Where is that legacy ?

Boy : I do not know what the safe contains.

Man : You had the key.

Boy : He only gave it to me before he left the house.
(The Man takes out a few more books then gives out a frenzied yell of joy.)

Man : The legacy !
(Takes out stacks of banknotes and piles them up on a table.)

Woman : Such a lot of money !

Man : How generous of you father, how good and kind !

Boy : He urges you not to spend a penny of it before you fully absorb the contents of those books.

Woman : We'd better begin by absorbing the money.

Boy : That was his will.

Man : Thank you, boy. You can go now if you wish.

Boy : What about the legacy ?

Man : Is there another ?

Boy (indicating the books) :
I meant that legacy.

Man : We shall carry out his will, very faithfully.
(The Woman steps on some books as she moves.)

Boy : Take your feet off.

Woman : Go in peace, and stop giving out orders.

Boy : If you do not need them, I shall put them back in the safe.

Man : It's the best thing you can do, my honest lad.
(The boy starts putting the books back in the safe. He carries them reverently, and all the while weeps silently).

Boy (Sadly when he has finished) :
I shall go now.

Man : Goodbye (Adds hastily) No, wait. You are a good boy. Would you like to work for me ?

Boy : Doing what, sir ?

Man : I can train you to become a clever waiter.

Boy : In a cafe ?

Man : In a Bar. It is more profitable than working in ten cafes.

Boy : I am going, sir.

Woman : Suit yourself
(The Boy exits).

Woman : Shouldn't we have searched him before letting him go ?

Man : If he were a thief he wouldn't have told us about the legacy.

Woman : We have to find a bag for the money.

Man : There must be a suitcase or something somewhere in this old dump.

Woman : You also have to think of what you are going to do with the house.

Man : It's best to sell it. It's extremely old, I know, but the land will fetch an excellent price.

Woman : And let's buy a block of flats with the money, and sell the bar as well, and lead a carefree life like rich people.

Man : What silly ideas ! I shall build a night-club as grand as the 'Auberge'.*

(A man appears at the door on the right, wearing a 'Galabiyyah' and a long overcoat. He is big and tall, and has the official air and look of a police detective. He takes a few steps into the room until he is only a short distance from where the man and woman stand. They both look at him in astonishment. His eyes move carefully over the room, light on the stacked up money, and then revert to the two figures standing before him.)

Man : Who are you.

Detective : Are you the son of the holy man ?

Man : I am, and who are you ?

Detective : I am a police detective.

Man : did you have an appointment with the Sheikh ?

Detective : The Sheikh is now with his Creator.

Man : How do you know that ?

Detective : He gave up the ghost out in the open, right behind my dwelling, in the spot where he always retired for worship and prayer.

Man : Where is the corpse ?

Detective : Where we shall all end up. He does not need

* A very posh and famous night-club in Haram Street in Cairo.

your care any more. Indeed, it seems to me you are already busy with something more important.

Man : And what can I do for you

Detective : I have come to take you to the police station.

Man : What for ?

Detective : You are accused of the murder of your father.

Man : What a joke ! But in very bad taste.

Woman : He hasn't seen him for ages.

Detective : You are accused of the murder of your father.

Man : Stop repeating this drivel.

Detective : I was there when he died ; I have known him for a long time and he told me himself with his last dying breath that you killed him.

Man : It's a blatant lie. The ravings of a dying man.

Detective : A dying man never lies. Besides he was a man of God.

Man : Then you must have misheard, or perhaps didn't understand what he wanted to say.

Detective : He said : I am dying by the hand of my only son. He stabbed me.

Woman : He was only expressing his grief at his son's absence.

Man : Have you found one stab in his body.

Detective : We'll leave that to the investigation.

Man : What investigation, man ? I haven't seen him for years I tell you.

Detective : And yet you allowed yourself to rob him without waiting to see him first ?

Man : That money is mine legally, my inheritance.

Detective : Then you knew he was dead.

Man : No.

Detective : How could you help yourself to his money if you thought he was alive ?

Man : He bequeathed it to me, before he left the house. That's what his boy told me.

Detective . And where is that boy ?

Woman : He is gone.

Detective : Call him to testify.

Man : I don't know where he is.

Detective : Then come along to the station.

Man : There is no crime. I have done nothing.

Detective : You have killed your father and robbed the state.

Man : The state !

Detective : Don't you know that it is illegal to dispose of a legacy before the state collects its death duty

Man : I never intended to spend a single a penny of it before the state got its full rights, so help me God.

Detective : You're even better at clowning than at killing and theiving.

Man : I asure you that the investigation will prove my innocence.

Detective : Well, before that happens, you will be arrested. and the money kept in custody.

Woman : Is this a way to treat a breaved man who has just lost his father.

Man : And such a good father too, a man who always steadied people's hearts and set their minds at ease !

Detective . You are a wicked man.

Man : And you're prejudiced, and suspicious.

Detective : In my job I have come across a lot of shady characters. I know your kind.

Man : I am an honest businessman.

Detective : You make me laugh. Come along. I don't want to do that in a house of mourning.

Woman : Do be nice and let him go.

Detective : You plead for him as if you were not yourself involved.

Woman : Me ?

Detective . You are his accomplice in both crimes.

Man : I am innocent. (Picks up a packet of banknotes and pushes it into the detective's hand). And this cash is mine.

Detective . Are you trying to bribe me ? This is another crime.

Man : God forbid. I am only paying the state duty.

Detective : The state is entitled to a quarter of the legacy.

Man (handing him another packet) : Here's another packet and let us not argue about it.

Detective : What about the case and its costs ? And the money going into custody, and possibly getting lost ?

Man : I have paid you enough already.

Detective : There will be lawyers' fees. All sorts of fees. Prison, possibly ?

Man (giving him another packet) : There. Remember I have already given you a fortune.

Detective : Yes, perhaps that's enough, as far as you are concerned ...

(The man and Woman look at each other, puzzled).

Detective : This lady, however, has not paid me a penny yet.

Woman : I am his wife.

Detective : I told you before that my work has made me familiar with the haunts of vice. So don't try to fool me.

Man : I have given you enough for both of us.

Detective : You ransomed only yourself.

Man : What do you want ?

Detective : My fee, for the lady.

Man (giving him a fourth packet) :
There. Now you have four packets.

Hetective : Why aren't you generous like all thieves and murderers ?

(The man frowns resentfully and hands over another packet.)

Man : Now. go. Goodbye.

(The Detective turns to go. The Man whips out a flick-knife, springing the blade, and jumps at him. The Detective, who seems to have been expecting such a treacherous move, dexterously avoids the knife, grips the Man's wrist, twists it, then punches him hard, sending him to the floor. He pulls a chair, slumps the man on it, takes a rope out of his pocket, and ties him skillfully before he has time to recover from the blow. All the while he has been threatening the woman that if she made one move or sound he will drag them both to the police station. He fetches another chair and forces the Woman to

sit on it. brings out another rope and ties her up too. He makes for the money that lies on the table, gathers it up and wraps it in a mat. He throws one look back at the couple, then goes out.

The Man recovers from the blow, looks around, remembers what has happened, and wriggles in his chair trying to free himself in vain).

Man ' He's gone !

Woman : With all the money.

Man (angrily) :...... ... ...
Why didn't you scream ? You should have yelled and screamed.

Woman : I was afraid he might come back and beat us up or perhaps kill us.

(The man tries to free himself once more with no success).

Man : I'll kill him, even if he flees to the ends of the earth.

Woman : It's all your fault. Your rashness landed us in this situation. Why did you attack him ?

Man : It is not one of my principles to let people bamboozle me. I don't take cheating lying down.

Woman : Well, he's taken all the money. I hope you're satisfied.

Man : I will take my revenge. It will be my one aim in life.

Woman : What if you achieve your aim ? The happy dream is shattered.

Man : I'll wring his neck sooner or later.

Woman : We have no witness, no evidence of what he has done.

Man : We have to break free first. That's what matters now.

Woman : I don't see how. We are tied up in a house where all the doors and windows are shut.

Man : It is terrible to think that we have really lost all that money.

Woman : It's the painful truth. You could kill him for all you want, but you won't recover a penny of it.

Man : No one has ever fooled around with me before.

Woman : This one has, as if you were nothing.

Man : What could I do ? He works with with the district police.

Woman : That is, if he was really a detective.

Man : What makes you say that ? Don't you think the was ?

Woman : You should have asked to see his identity card.

Man : You're right . I must admit I botched up this business.

Woman : You-re conceited, that's what you are . You go around thinking you're so high and mighty, but any trickster can trip you up, and you fall headlong like a dead weight.

Man : I can't believe this has really happened.

Woman : My heart tells me that man was no detective.

Man : He is a professional thief whatever else he may be.

Woman : And, perhaps he was not even a man.

Man : What do you mean

Woman : I mean that the house of a holy man is usually haunted by ghosts and spirits.

Man : You are a silly fool. Only rational men steal money.

Woman : Do you remember how he burst into the place and how he went ?

Man : He came as criminals do, and went away with what criminals are usually after.

Woman : You can never think clearly when you are angry.

Man : And You are a fool, that goes without saying.

Woman : We'd better consider out situation. Here we are, tied up in a devilish manner. The house stands in a huge courtyard, isolated from the alley. No one will hear us if we shout.

I don't like it here. There is the spirit of a dead man who is perhaps not yet buried. There may be other spirits too that we know nothing about and can have no power over.

Man : You're mad, you drivelling idiot ! You're raving !

Woman : I'm afraid.

Man : You have always been a mocking whore. Where is your bold, depraved insolence ?

Woman : This is a deserted house, can't you see ? Your father's body is now lying in the morgue. He will be buried like an unidentified corpse. The Detective, won't say a word. The house will remain shut and deserted for quite sometime, time enough for us to starve and die of thirst. There are the spirits too ...

Man : What spirits ?

Woman : I am frightened.

Man : How did he manage to tie us so securely ? He

came prepared. He knew exactly what he was going to do.

Woman : He may come back to finish us off.

Man : Let him.

(Pause. The Man tries desperately once more to free himself, but fails.)

Woman : It's like a dream.

Man : But worse and more stupid than reality.

Woman : It nearly makes me laugh.

Man : Do if you can.

Woman : Even our old life among the adventurers, the rivals, and the enemies was better and more bearable than this imprisonment in your father's house.

Man : God rest his soul.

Woman : Pray to him to save us.

Man (sarcastically) :

Our father, that art in the morgue, save thine one and only son.

Woman : What did you think of your father ?

Man : He was a fraud like his only son.

Woman : And yet, wherever we went people talked of his miracles.

Man : It's a crazy alley of dopes and dithering half-wits.

Woman : But the peace of mind he inspired was real nonetheless.

Man : Give me back my fortune and I'll make you wallow in it.

Woman : We were not poor, and yet we have never had it.

Man : How could it find its way to a bar ? A meeting place for rogues and ruffians, lying among tens of rival bars, in a district swarming with enemies ? And lurking behind it all, and shadowing everything, was always that persistent feeling of being hunted, on the run. With the money we could have soared above all that.
(Pause)

Woman : Darkness will come and we'll still be here, tied up, in this haunted house.

Man : Light or darkness ... It doesn't make much difference.

Woman . We have to find a way out of this hole !

Man : Yell. Your voice is sharper than a bullet.

Woman : No one will hear us.

Man : We have to wait then, haven't we ? Either someone will come unexpectedly and save us, or else death will.

(Pause during which they make unsuccessful attempts to free themselves).

Woman · Why did your father want you to come ?

Man : That secret has died with him.

Woman : What did *you* think ?

Man : I thought it was the yearning of an old man's heart.

Woman : But that wasn't all you thought.

Man : And I dreamt of a fortune.

Woman : And he gave you one.

Man : And I have lost it.

Woman : But he wanted you to take over after him, didn't he ?

Man : It was a ridiculous idea.

Woman : You should have humoured him, pretended to go along with his plans.

Man : It wouldn't have made any difference.

Woman : Perhaps what happened would not have happened.

Man : I'll bet anything you have lost your mind.

Woman : Did he try to initiate you into his secrets when you were young ?

Man : Yes.

Woman : But you rebelled. Why ?

Man : I would never have come your way if I hadn't.
(She laughs but says nothing.)

Man : He tried so many times. I never understood a word he said.
Behaving disgracefully was my way of defying him. He finally chucked me out.

Woman : And instead of a peaceful secure life you became a professional swindler.

Man : I inherited that talent from him, only I invested it in its proper field.

Woman : I have yet to hear someone praise you the way they praise him.

Man : I live among wily adventurers ; He lived among fools.

Woman : I feel dizzy.

Man : Real life and peace of mind just don't go together. They are opposites. And reverting to superstition doesnt' help ; it is just ridiculous. All right, perhaps there is something missing in our lives, but we have to go on living all the same. What do you want ?

Woman : I want to get safely out of here.

Man : We shall, sooner or later.

Woman : It will soon be dark.

Man : Let it.

Woman : It's all your fault.

Man : Chicken.

Woman : Rat.

Man : Not a bad pastime ! Let us have a slanging match until we are out of this.

Woman : Or until we're dead.

Man : Or until we're dead.
(The Woman weeps in vexation and the Man laughs nervously).

Woman : He is teaching you a lesson.

Man : Who ?

Woman : Your father.

Man : He couldn't do it while he was alive, I do not see how hc can do it now, being dead.

Woman : The events are linked in a mysterious way.

Man : They are not linked in any way.

Woman : And we have walked into the trap.

Man : A trap of our own making. We are caught because we were foolish.
(The light dims indicating the approach of night. Silence. Further failed attempts at breaking free.)

Woman : The night is coming.

Man : Nothing we could do about that, is there ?

Woman : We could have, at least ...

Man (interrupting sarcastically) :
Once upon a time ...

Woman : I hate the dark, I hate being tied. I shall go mad.

Man : Madness is definitely more respectable than superstitiousness. I recommend it.

Woman : You're mean and cruel. As if you haven't enjoyed my love for years !

Man : Get a hold on yourself and let us discuss things rationally as we have always done.

Woman : Even your love was a mere adventure. a fit of nerves, a baseless erratic emotion.

Man : The past was no paradise, and the future won't be either. You have to take life as it is.

Woman : It's getting darker and darker !

Man : Let it.

Woman : You are quibbling only to hide your fear ..

Man : Damn ! ...... Business should be starting now at the bar !

Woman : What a cheap end !
(The light continues to fade until the whole room is plunged in darkness and the Man and Woman are swallowed up in it. The Woman screams for help, then all is silent.)

Woman : Can't you recite something to keep the evil spirits away from us ?

Man : I don't know anything by heart.

Woman : I am frightened.

Man : There is no real reason why you should be.

Woman : But I am.

Man : I am near you.

Woman : But I can't see you.

Man : Let us have a bawdy song to mock the darkness.

(The girl screams, then whimpers in the silent darkness. A light shines into the room through the fanlight.)

Woman : Can you see that ? There is a light in there ! There is someone in there ! The house is haunted. !

Man (in a loud voice) ;
Who is there ?

Woman : I am all jittery.

Man : Who is in there ?

(The door opens. The Boy appears carrying a lamp and walks into the room. He stops at the sight of the Man and Woman.)

Man : You ! Were you in there all the time ?

Boy : I thought you had gone.

Woman : Can't you see that we are tied up ?

Boy : Whatever made you do that ?

Woman : Are you making fun of us ?

Man : Were you in there ? I mean, didn't you leave the house ?

Boy : I came back in the evening to light the lamps.

Man : Why ?

Boy : In deference to the spirit of my master on the day he departed.

Man : Put down that lamp and untie us quickly.
(The Boy goes to the console at the back, puts down the lamp, then makes for the door.)

Man : Boy !
(The Boy stops).

Man : Come near.

Boy : What is it you want, sir ?

Man : Couldn't you guess what we want ?

Boy : Before he went, my master commanded me not to offer you any help if you neglected his legacy.

Man : You mean you're going to leave us like that ? It's impossible !

Boy : I can't break my master's orders.

Woman : You can't mean that. You are such a nice boy. I am sure you wouldn't abandon us in our plight.

Boy : I will not disobey my master's orders.

Man : But your master never thought we would be in such adversities.

Boy : May god forgive you, sir.

Woman : A wicked thief has stolen all your master's money, and bound us with these ropes. Don't you care ?

Boy : I have to go now.

Man : Don't anger your master in his grave.

Boy : My master is in heaven.

Man : All right. Don't anger your master in his heaven.

Boy : If I do not disobey him he will not be angry.

Man : Do you think he would be pleased if you leave us like that without help ?

Boy : I do not know.

Man : Then do it. Don't be afraid.

Boy : I will not disobey my master's orders.

Woman : Do it for my sake. You can't refuse to help a woman.

Boy : I am going.

Man : No. Wait. I want my father's real legacy.

Boy : You know where it is.

Man : But I can't reach it.

Boy : You rejected it before.

Man : I regret that deeply.

Boy : I will not disobey my master's orders.
(The Boy starts walking towards the door.)

Woman : You can at least call the police.
(The Boy continues on his way, paying no attention).

Man : Will you call the police ?

Boy : No.
(He disappears closing the door behind him.)

Man : The cursed devil
(The Woman starts whimpering again.)

Man : Stop it. Stop it or I'll ......

Woman : We are doomed.

Man : The boy came back once, perhaps he'll come again. Others may come too.
(A short pause).

Man : I think that the old man has tricked me into coming here to torment me. His kindness and gentleness were simply a tool of his trade, not his real nature. How else could he beget a son like me. I don't think my mother could be solely responsible for my wild

blood. And like a fool I came, heedles of his cunning scheme. That was the very first mistake which led to all the others.

Woman : Stop abusing your father. Can't you see that the house is haunted ?

Man : Yes, by the evil spirits of our old family, with their long history of wickedness.

Woman : The boy is not really a boy, and the detective was not really a detective. There will be fresh disasters that we never reckoned with.

Man : Let them all come without reckoning.
(Pause followed by Curtain.)

(The Curtain rises. It is morning. Daylight fills the room, but the lamp is still burning. The Man and Woman are asleep, their heads slumped on the backs of their chairs. We hear the sound of the outside door opening and shutting, and a very big man walks in. very elegantly dressed. We recognize him as the previous Detective despite the change of dress and general bearing. He is followed by a secretary and a police officer.

The Man and the woman wake up. They look worn out. They gaze at the new-comers in rapt amazement, and fail to recognize the identity of the stately figure before them.)

Officer : Who are you ? And who has done this to you ?

Man : Who are you ?

Officer : A police officer on the force of this district.

Woman : Help us, please

(The Officer unties them. They stand up stretching and groaning, and move their stiff and numb limbs about to recover their balance.)

Officer : Who are you then ?

Man : I am the son of the man who owns this house ; I mean the late holy man.

Woman : I am his wife.

Officer : What happened ?

Man : We were treacherously assaulted and robbed

Officer : We'll open the investigation in a little while.

Man : Was it the boy who told you about us ?

Officer : What boy ?

Man : My late father's boy.

Officer : No. I came with this gentleman here because he wanted to look at the house. He's an architect and he wishes to buy it. He didn't know the Sheikh had an heir ; thought the house was deserted.

(The Man and Woman turn their attention to the archiect for the first time and their faces display astonishment then deep perturbation. They look at each other, then at the architect in disbelief.)

Officer : What is it ?

Architect : Why are you looking at me like that ?

Man : It is you !

Woman : It's him ... Same figure, same voice, same face.

Architect : What do you mean ?

Man : It's you and nobody else, you villain !

(He lunges at him, but the officer and the secretary stand between them. The architect draws away shocked and dismayed.)

Officer : What villain are you talking about ? This man is the biggest contractor in the country.

Man : It's him, the detective, I mean the thief who robbed us.

(The Architect, the secretary, and the Officer burst out laughing).

Officer : You'd better control your tongue.

Woman : But he *is* the detective.

Man : He is the thief.

Officer : Stop this nonescense the two of you.

Architect : Be gentle with them officer. They have had a very tough night. We mustn't forget that.

Man : You won't deceive me, you know ? So don't try.

Officer : You are insulting the best of men. A man who

has rendered his country the greatest services in the field of architecture.

(The Man and Woman look at each other in per plexity.)

Man : Tell me officer, do you have in your station a detective who looks exactly like him ?

Officer : No. I am quite certain.

Architect : Please, compose yourself. I know you have spent a terrible night, and it is possible that the criminal who attacked you bears a certain likeness to me. You yourself bear some resemblance to your father, though your style of life, it seems to me, is quite the opposite of his. The officer will no doubt catch your criminal for you and recover your money. Was it a large sum ?

Man : You are the best judge of that.

Officer : He is back to his hallucinations.

Man : I assure you this man is the criminal who attacked us last night.

Officer : You'd better stop this nonesense. I am warning you.

Secretary : Young people seem to develop strange and fanciful grudges which grow into settled beliefs. And when one of them experiences some kind of shock he builds out of his secret resentments such destructive views which he then projects and vents

on the most successful and distinguished members of society in order to discredit and ruin them.

Officer : Are you one of those ?

Man : I am a victim. You yourself have set me free.

Officer : But you haven't recovered your senses yet.

Architect : And you will have to do it soon, or I can't finish this job.

(Short pause).

Woman : And what's that job ?

Architect : I want to buy this old house. I shall pull it down and build a factory of electronic equipments.

Woman : Did you discuss this with the owner before he died ?

Architect : I tried and offered him a new house in the forefront of the district. But, you see, we spoke different langnages ; we couldn't see eye to eye.

Man : So, you know the house, and knew the owner.

Architect : I did, Indeed. My father, God rest his soul, was one of his disciples.

Man : Then you are ...

(Tre Woman pulls him by the arm to stop him finishing his sentence and takes him aside).

Woman : Control yourself.

Man : But it is him.

Woman : The investigation will take care of that. What matters now is selling the house.

Man : He will buy it with my own money.

Woman : Do you want us to come out of this empty-handed ?

Man : He can't deceive me even if he were the devil himself.

Woman : You're so clever, I know. But forget it now, and for the moment put aside also your plans for revenge.

(They rejoin the others.)

Woman : Forgive his rashness, sir, for the sake of his father's memory. He was a good man.

Architect : God rest his soul and have mercy on him.

Man : Did you believe in him ?

Architect : I loved him.

Man : Were you there when he died ?

Architect : No, but I was at the funeral. Where were you ?

Man : I was tied up here with the ropes of a wicked villain.

Architect : Don't worry. I am sure the officer will restore to you your lost fortune. All you have to do now is to accept your position and be contented with it, as your dear father used to say.

Man : But you didn't believe in him.

Architect (laughing) :

He would say to me : "peace of mind is the ultimate objective of the human spirit." And I would reply : "rather progress. our master, even at the cost of toil and anxiety".

Man : And perhaps assault and robbery as well ?

Woman : Let's go back to the factory project.

Architect . Since there is an heir to the house we will have to wait until the legal matters concerning the inheritance are settled, and the house bceomes legally his property.

Woman : It's a big house with an excellent position on the outskirts of the desert. And don't forget the furniture. It's all rare. Practically antique.

Architect : I have no use for it.

Woman : What about the books which worked all those miracles ?

Architect : I have all the books and miracles that I need.

Woman : Isn't it time we discussed the price ?

Architect : I will make you a fair offer ; but we will talk about that when the time comes.

(The architect execuses himself and makes ready to go, but before he walks out he turns to the Man and addresses him) :

Architect : What do you do for a living ?

Man : I run a bar.

Architect (laughing) :

Not so very different from your father after all ! People go to a bar as well, seeking peace of mind. (He exits with his secretary. The Officer approaches the Man and Woman).

Officer : And now we can begin our investigation.

(Curtain)

The End

THE RESCUE

(A living-room. In the middle of the back wall there is a lighted fire-place. On its right, a door leads into the bedroom ; on its left, a door leads into the study. At the far end of the right wall stands the outside door of the flat. On the opposite wall there is a small bar and a television set. A man wearing a house-coat sits in a big armchair opposite the fire, reading a book.

The outside door bell rings suddenly and persistently. The Man gets up and goes to the door. He opens it and a woman rushes in. She is panting hard, as if she has been running. She is good-looking, wears an overcoat and carries a handbag. The man looks at her in surprise, still holding the door open. It is clear that he does not know her and was not expecting her.)

Man : Excuse me, I think you ...

Woman (anxiously) :

Shut the door. Please shut the door.

(He closes the door, completely baffled.)

Man : Are you alone ?

Woman : Yes.

(They stand looking at each other).

Woman : I am exhausted. Can I sit down

Man : Please do.

(They sit down on two close chairs near the fire-place. The woman rests her head on her hand tiredly and continues to pant, her chest rising and falling quite noticably. The Man examines her, extremely bewildered. He begins to appreciate her good looks despite the awkwardness of the situation).

Man : I don't have anyone here. The servant left after cooking supper. But I can get you a glass of water. (He goes to the bar, pours water into a glass from a jug, and offers it to her. She drinks half the class, then places it on a small table between the two seats.)

Woman : I really am very sorry to disturb you like this.

Man : If there is anything I can do ...

Woman : Thank you.

Man : Is it something you need ?

Woman : I am sorry once more. I really don't know what to say.

(Pause.)

Woman : I know I should explan but I truly don't know what to say.

Man : Catch your breath first.

Woman : I don't know how to explain, but please, please be kind to me all the same.

Man : Why shouldn't I be ?

Woman : I meant to treat me like a woman who is in terrible need of ...

Man : Yes ?

Woman : Protection.

Man : From what ?
(Pause.)

Man : But you haven't told me yet who you are.

Woman : That doesn't matter at all.

Man : I think it does.

Woman : No. It's of no consequence whatsoever.

Man : I won't press you. But I have another question. Did you come to me in particular ? I mean, do you know me ?

Woman : You were the first one to let me in, that is all.

Man : You have tried the other flats ?

Woman : Yes.

Man : What are you afraid of ?

Woman : For my sake, don't tell anyone who calls that I'm here.

Man (worriedly) :

Do you think that whoever is following you will come up here ?

Woman : Yes.

Man : Is it a man or a woman ?

Woman : A man.

***Man (hesitantly)* :**

Your husband ?

Woman : No.

Man : A friend ? ... A relation ?

Woman : Can't you protect me without an inquiry ?

Man : But ...

Woman (*interrupting*) :

You have to think of your family, is that it ?

Man : There is no one else here.

Woman : But of course your wife will soon be back.

Man : I am not married.

Woman : Great ! That makes it much easier, that is, if you consent of course.

Man : But I need to be enlightened a little.

Woman : You won't come to any harm.

Man : But I would like to know what I am letting myself in for.

Woman : In a few hours I shall leave your home forever, as if I had never existed.

Man (hiding his embarrassment with a smile)
It would be difficult to forget you.

Woman : Which is it to be ? Flattery or questioning ?

Man : A bit of both, though I would have loved to stick purely to the former.

(Pause.)

Man : If you had honoured me with this visit and left without anybody knowing about it, it would have been all right. But since someone might follow you here and I am supposed to deny your presence, I need to know a little.

Woman : You won't be blamed for anything.

Man : But I could be dragged into troubles I never reckoned with.

Woman : You're exaggerating.

Man : Don't leave me in the dark.

(Pause.)

Man : Please, don't force me to ...

Woman : To hand me over to the first man who knocks at your door ?

Man : Please, try to understand my position.

Woman : I am hanging only to one hope. a residue of the old heroic chivalry.

Man : Unfortunately, the age of chivalry and epics is gone.

Woman : When you are desperate, the mind seeks refuge in the time of legends.

Man : My dear lady. I am a man, not a legend ...

(Pause.)

Man : Please think it over and answer my questions.

Woman : But I can't, I can't.

Man : Before it is too late.

Woman : Won't you be generous to the end ?

Man (angrily) :

I smell something suspicious. something quite disturbing.

Woman : What is it ?

Man : The smell of some crime.

Woman : Don't push me to suicide !

Man : What is it you have done ?

(The bell rings. The woman jumps up in terror and rushes into the bedroom. She closes the door and locks it on the inside. The Man wrestles with it but fails to open it. The bell rings once more.)

Man : Open the door.

Woman : Won't you be kind ?

Man : I don't want any trouble.

Woman : Have pity.

Man : Then I'll do what I have to do.

Woman : If you tell anyone I am here I shall throw myself out of the window.

Man : You are mad !

Woman : I am very sane, I assure you.

Man : Is this how you pay me back ?

Woman : I am sorry, but I have no choice.

Man : Wait. Don't do anything rash.

(He goes to the door foaming and cursing and opens it. A man walks in laughing and shuts the door behind him.)

Friend : Were you asleep ?

Man : It's you, damn you !

Friend : What a reception !

(They move in the direction of the fire-place.)

Friend : What's up ?

Man : Nothing.

Friend : There is a police cordon round the building. They asked me a lot of questions before letting me through.

Man : Really ? What happened ?

Friend : I couldn't make anything of it, no one would answer my questions. But it seems there has been an accident or a crime of some sort. The only thing I know for certain is that they are looking for a woman.

Man : Where ?

Friend : Some where in the building. There are policemen everywhere ; the place is swarming with them. Didn't yau feel anything ?

Man : No.

(They sit down. the Friend taking the seat occupied earlier by the woman. He sniffs around curiously).

Friend : I smell a woman !

Man : I wonder what really happened. Who could this woman be, and what could she have done ?

Friend : Don't worry your head over it ; you'll know

everything in the morning. But I was saying, I smell the perfume of a woman.

Man : The perfume of a woman ?

Friend : And quite pleasant too ! Do you have a sweetheart in there ?

Man : No.

Friend : And the perfume ?

Man : Oh, a female friend came over ...

Friend : Congratulations. But, there is something odd about you. What's wrong ?

Man : I am quite well, thank you.

Friend : No. You are not your usual self.

Man : It's the cold, I suppose.

Friend (pointing at the fire-place) :
You have your own paradise in the middle of this hard winter.

(Pause.)

Friend : Is it anyone I know.

Man : Who ?

Friend : The woman who was here.

Man : No.

Friend : Why did she leave early ?

Man : One investigation is enough. There is one going on right now in the building.

Friend : You remind me. I wonder what happened ?

Man : Yes. I wonder .

Friend : You know more about Vietnam than about a flat next door in a new building.

Man : What crime could it be ? And where could the woman have gone ?

Friend : Never mind. Crimes are daily occurrences, almost like meals.

Man : And the woman ?

Friend : A murderess, perhaps. or an accomplice in a murder, or the secret behind some crime.

Man : Where could she possibly hide ?

Fdiend : Perhaps they have found her by now, unless she lives here already.

Man : It's possible.

Friend : Or she might have taken refuge in some flat.

Man : No one would take her in unless they had some thing to do with the matter.
(He gets up, moves to the far end of the room, away from the bedroom, and gestures to his friend to follow him. The Friend joins him.)

Man (in a whisper) :
I have a problem.

Friend : What problem ?

(The door bell rings.)

Friend : Are you expecting any one ?

(The Man goes to the door after some hesitation and opens it.)

A Voice outside : May I come in ?

Man : Please, do.

(A police-officer walks in and introduces himself by showing his card.)

Officer : We are looking for a woman who escaped into the building.

(The man feigns surprise.)

Man : What woman ?

Officer : An escaped woman. It is very important for the state security that she should be found.

Man : No one has come to my flat.

Officer : Are you the head of the family ?

Man : I live alone. (Pointing at his friend) This is only a friend who is visiting me.

Officer : May I see your identify card ?

(The Man goes into the study and returns with the card. He hands it over to the officer who examines it carefully then gives the Man a type written sheet.)

Officer : This is a written statement to the effect that

the woman never came to your flat this evening. You have to sign it, but first, I would like to remind you that making a false statement could be a very serious business.

(The Man signs the paper. The Officer takes it and leaves. The Man shuts the door and walks slowly over to his friend who stands in the middle of the room.)

Friend : It looks more serious than we thought.

Man : These are only routine measures.

Friend : Never mind that. You were talking of a problem.

Man : A problem ?

Friend : The officer's visit has dispersed your thoughts.

Man : Perhaps.

Friend : Let's get back to the problem.
(Pause.)

Friend : Don't you want to talk about it ?

Man : Something more serious has come up.

Friend : Don't worry about matters that don't concern you.

Man : If they don't find the woman they might get a general search warrant, mightn't they ?

Friend : It's possible.

Man : And they could search my flat.

Friend : It is not very likely.

Man : But possible.

Friend : You still have time to get rid of all the compromising stuff.

Man : How ?

Friend : There is the window.

Man : But the block is surrounded.

Friend : There is always the fire.

Man : There are things you can't burn.

Friend : You are mad ! I have often warned you. Still, the chance of a search is only very slim. It's a woman they are looking for, not a needle. Sooner or later they'll find her.

Man : There is something you could do for me.

Friend : Look here, you know very well that I always play it safe. Leave our friendship out of this. I prefer it to remain innocent of such matters.

Man : This is the age of fear and police terror. Gone is the chivalry of legends.

Man : At least we are afraid of something concrete. As for legends, well ...

(Pause.)

Friend : Are you going to be all right ?

Man : You won't do anything for me : why should you care ?

Friend : We both know each other's limits.

Man : I need to be alone. All I ask you is to keep me informed of any developments on the phone.

Friend : I'll ring you up as soon as I get home.

(They shake hands, and the Man accompanies the Friend to the door. and closes it behind him, then rushes to the bedroom door.)

Man : You can come out now. There is no one here except me.

(She opens the door and steps out. They stand facing each other.)

Man : Your'e hurling your despair at my head.

Woman : I rushed in here impulsively ; there was no choice. And now I find I have fallen into a trap.

Man : They'll be back with a search warrant.

Woman : Don't worry about me. I can look after myself.

Man : It is me I am worried about in fact.

Woman : You have every right to do that, and I am really sorry, so sorry I could die.

Man : You have created so many problems for me, and complications.

Woman : There is nothing I can do about it now.

Man : Why is the police looking for you ?
(Pause).

Man : Why is the police after you ?

Woman : They are after many others ...

Man : Your accomplices ?

Woman : Among others.

Man (sharply) :
What do you mean ?

Woman (smiling) :
I overhead your conversation with your friend.
(Pause. He glowers at her.)

Man : Is that a threat ?

Woman · Perhaps we are birds of a feather after all.

Man : That's a slander

Woman : I am sorry.

Man : I am a respectable man.

Woman : And I, a respectable woman.

Man : That depends on how each of us understands the word.

Woman : In other words, neither of us is respectable.

Man : Are we going to spend the evening merrily quipping and chatting ?

Woman : I feel sorry and utterly dejected.

Man : I should have told the officer the truth.

Woman : Why didn't you ?

Man : It was a mistake, I admit that.

Woman : You did well not to. I would have committed suicide and they would have suspected you of being involved with the dead woman.

Man : The truth would have come out eventually.

Woman · Perhaps. But first there would have been the unwelcome search. I wonder what dangerous secrets you hide in this elegant flat of yours ?

Man : Only a hardened criminal could be so flippant.

Woman : Or, a very desperate woman, perhaps.

Man : What did you do ?

Woman : Something that is quite familiar in history. but the police insist on calling it a crime. What about you ?

Man : I will not be questioned. But tell me, what crime exactly did you commit ?

Woman : What difference does it make ? ... Or could make to our situation ?

Man : Do they know who you are ?

Woman : It's quite likely.

Man : But not certain ?

Woman : Tonight, nothing is certain.

Man : Why don't you try leaving my flat, pretending you're someone else ?

Woman : They will not let me through without an inquiry. Besides, there is probably a detective in the hall outside the flat. You will be dragged into the investigation and everything will come out.

Man : What will come out ?

Woman : Why, the truth about you and about me.

Man (angrily) : Don't make me forget my manners.

Woman : Sorry.

Man : You're only stalling, you know.

Woman : There's nothing else I can do.

Man : If I were you ...

Woman : Yes, What would you do ?

Man : I'd give myself up.

Woman : That would be a very natural and plausible solution to *your problem.*

Man : And yours too, since they will inevitably come for you in the end.

Woman : Not inevitably.

Man (furiously) :

But you are gambling with my life !

Woman : It's very unfortunate indeed, but you see, I'd much rather kill myself than surrender.

Man : You can do with yourself what you like, but away from me.

Woman : I wish that were possible.

Man : What fate has cursed me with you ?

Woman : The same one that has cast me at your doorstep. (She laughs nervously)

Man : You quip and joke as if you were at a reception.

Woman : When we lose all hope, we have to learn to live well with despair.

Man : But there's still one hope.

Woman : Really ? What is that ?

Man : I can chuck you out.

Woman : I'll attempt suicide, it is my last line of defence.

Man : Are you blackmailing me ?

Woman : It's a disgraceful position to be in, quite deplorable. But I did not create it of my own free will.

Man : You are a born criminal.

Woman (smiling) :

Perhaps we are two of a kind.

Man (flaring up) :

The devil take you. I pray the earth opens and swallows you up.

Woman : No man has ever been so rude to me in my whole life !

(The Man loses his temper, swoops on her and drags her to the door. She resists desperately. A scuffle ensues with a great deal of violent pushing and pulling. The Man loses his balance and both fall onto a couch. The struggle continues, gradually assuming a strong resemblance to love-making. Their movements acquire a different taste and intensity. An unexpected element has come into play, and in their tension and desperation the two respond to it. He suddenly holds her tight and kisses her violently.

The light fades to total blackout, then rises gradually until it reaches its former level.

They are now sitting in the same chairs as they were at the beginning of the play. She is looking at the ceiling, he, at the fire.)

Man : I wonder what's happening outside now ?

Woman : The same as inside.

Man : What do you mean ?

Woman : A lot of careful crime, and a lot of careless sex.

Man : And love ?

Woman : Momentary embraces snatched in between exchanging blows and twisting each other's arms. (Pause.)

Man : What is your crime ?

Woman : What is yours ?

Man : I have a right to ask you. You haven't.

Woman : I tave a duty not to talk.

Man : But I am not a policeman.

Woman : On my silence depends the safety of others.

Man : Was it forgery ? ... Narcotics ? ... Prostitution ? .. Politics ?

Woman : All are equally social phenomena. (Pause).

Man : Married ?

Woman : I won't answer that after what happened.

Man : Was it is the first time you were unfaithful ?

Woman : Can't you see that I'd rather die than be unfaithful !

Man : Was it love then ?

Woman : A hysterical fit, nothing more.

Man : You regret it ?

Woman : There is no time for that.

Man : What if I were to ask you again ?

Woman : We have had time enough to reach the age of discretion.

Man : Do we part as strangers ? ...

Woman : Like we met.

Man : ...With nothing in common ?

Woman : Crime. We have that in common.
(Pause.)

Woman : Are you a bachelor ?

Man : Yes.

Woman : Why didn't you marry ?

Man : I am not old enough yet.

Woman : And when will you become old enough ?

Man : Perhaps I am waiting for the woman who can sweep me off my feet. But don't you see that we can't just go on chatting as if we were having a pleasant quiet evening ?

Woman : It's better than silence.

Man : The rope is tightening round our necks.

Woman : I feel guilty about you already. Don't rub it in.

Man : We can still try our luck.

Woman : How ?

Man : You can take a chance on leaving.

Woman : If it hadn't been for the others, I would have done it.

Man : And you would ruthlessly trample me on your way ?

Woman : As others have trampled me.

Man : But what have I got to do with all this ?

(He is possessed by a sudden fury, leaps to his feat, seizes her by the arm so as to pull her, but she eases it out of his grip calmly.)

Woman : Don't. Nothing ever happens the same way twice.

Man : You're ... You're ....

(The telephone rings. He goes to it where it is placed on a stand near the bar.)

Man : Hello.

: ....

Man : You're late. Where have you been ?

: ....

Man : What did you say ?

: ....

Man : Incredible ! Don't you know why ?

: ....

Man : Very strange indeed.

: ....

Man : All right . . same as you left me.

: ....

Man : No, I'm not alone ... I mean I am alone with my worries ; they keep me company.

: ....

Man : No, truly. I am quite alone, just as you left me.

: ....

Man : You're insane. What crazy ideas !

: ....

Man : There is nothing to be suspicious about. Goodbye. (He puts down the receiver and goes back to his seat. They look at each other questioningly).

Man : It's my friend. The one who was here.

Woman : What did he say ?

Man : I don't know what's happened to the world ! All the streets around are full of policemen. Just who are you ?

Woman : Just what you see, an unlucky woman.

Man : You have the key to this mystery.

Man : What difference does it make whether they surround the building or the whole district ?

Man : Only a very grave matter would bring them out in such force.

Woman : I am not it.

Man : Perhaps you are the lead.

Woman : This wouldn't lead us anywhere.

Man : I will not let you destroy me.

Woman : You had the chance of confessing the truth and you missed it.
That was your mistake.

Man : But I won't let it cost me everything, I can tell you.

Woman : Why lose your temper again ? Nothing new has happened.

Man : The danger is closer than we imagined !

Woman : We are gamblers, aren't we ? The sensible gambler must learn to live with danger.

Man : You're an adventurer.

Woman : And so are you, you can't deny it.

Man : I never thought I'd come to such a stupid end.

Woman : All ends are stupid.

Man : I would like to kill you even if I have to kill myself afterwards.

Woman : That would be another stupid end.

Man : And to think that I could go through all this without even knowing who you are ,or what's happening around me.

Woman : Details are not important. It's enough to know that we are hunted, and that on every side, overhead and underneath, we are surrounded by implacable enemies

(Pause.)

Woman : I have a suggestion.

(He looks sourly at her without saying a word.)

Woman : We need to have some fun.

Man : Fun ? !

Woman : Why not ? Even a man who is about to hang is allowed one last wish.

Man : You're mad.

Woman : Let's have a drink.

Man : With all that's going on around us, overhead, and underneath ?

Woman : I think of myself already as a dead woman, and, to tell you the truth, one part of me is quite relieved. I think you too feel the same, more or less. Either we spend the time having a slanging match or having fun. Which is it to be ?

Man : How can you even bear to think of fun when you could be dead any minute ?

Woman : That's the way with all mankind, with one slight difference : we know much more about our end.

(Pause.)

Woman : Shall we try ?

(She goes to the bar, fetches a bottle and two glasses and pours two drinks. She holds one, and raises the other to the Man's lips).

Woman : To our first meeting without previous acquaintance.

(She drains her glass and tips the Man's drink into his mouth. He gulps is without interest. She refills the glasses.)

Woman : To our immenent separation after deep acquaintance.

(She drinks and looks at him imploringly until he does. She refills the glasses for the third time.)

Woman : To the countless causes of death.

(They drink and she fills up for the fourth time.)

Woman : To all the fateful dreams that end in death.

(They drink and begin to look more cheerful under the influence of the wine. This time he pours the fifth drink.)

Woman : To sex in the middle of violence and fighting.

(They drink. The wine takes effect, and they look slightly tipsy. He pours a sixth drink for both of them.)

Man : To the police, the enemy of all dreams.

(They drink and look more intoxicated. He Refills for the seventh time.)

Woman : To the first man who invented the alphabet.
(They drink, and the effect of the wine begins to show in their voices and movements. He refills for the eighth time.)

Man : To the first man who invented a beauty instrument.
(They drink. Refills for the ninth time.)

Woman : To the first man who wrote a love-letter . .
(They drink, and he pours their tenth drink.)

Man : To the health of the missing link.

Woman : To the detective standing in the hall outside.

Man : Cheers.

Woman : Cheers . .
(Both drink then get up swaying.)

Man : If we forget the past, this whole thing will be over.

Woman : It is all over.

Man : But I shall never forget the very first thing I ever wished for as a child . .

Woman : What was it ?

Man : To own a food-cart and sell 'Kuskusi'.
(They burst out laughing.)

Woman : And now, let's have some art.

Man : Good idea.

(He goes to the television set and switches it on. A cowboy film is in progress with plenty of shooting. The Woman cries out in protest and draws from the set. The Man turns it off.)

Man : Tell you what. Let's dance.

(They dance without music. He holds her very close to him and kisses her every now and then. He stops and lifts her up in his arms and is about to carry her to the bedroom when he loses his balance. They both fall and lie down on the floor, side by side, laughing. He continues kissing her in between fits of laughter. She makes no resistance but shifts her body a little nearer the phone. She stretches her hand, picks up the receiver and dials a number. During the call, the Man who is thoroughly drunk by now, pays little attention to what she says, and goes on kissing her).

Woman : Hello.

: ....

Woman : Good evening ... You must be worried, I know. I'm sorry ...

: ....

Woman . I had a couple of drinks ... Force of circumstances.

: ....

Woman : I can't answer any questions now. There's no time.

: ....

You will read it all in the papers ...

: ....

Woman : Don't wait for me . I want you to know that I I was faithful to you till the very end . . Goodbye . .

Man : You betray me openly ?

Woman : The past deserves a goodbye ...

Man : You're a little devil.

Woman : From now on, I'll be yours alone, forever.

Man : Till death ?

Woman : To the death ...

Man : Even should we live for a whole hour ?

Woman : Even if we live for an hour and a quarter. (The door-bell rings. They look at it with extreme anxiety despite their drunkenness. They rise to their feet with difficulty, stumbling and falling. She staggers to the seat where she had left her bag.)

Woman · They will only find a triumphant corpse ...

Man : I shan't open the door.

Woman : They'll break it down.

Man : We'll tell them we are man and wife. all right ?

Woman : You told the officer something to the contrary.

Man : I'll tell him I got married after he left.

Woman : It may take such a short time to die. As for marriage, it requires at least a year ...

(The bell rings intermittently, but persistently. The Man turns his back on the woman and faces the door. She fetches a tube out of her bag, takes out a pill and swallows it with what is left in her glass. She staggers, then falls over the table, sprawled on her face. She is dead. The Man does not realize what has happened. He is trying to make up his mind whether to stop where he is or go to the door. He looks back and sees the Woman lying on her face.)

Man : Are you so drunk you have fallen asleep ?

(He looks at her placidly.)

Man : You're such a pretty young woman.

(The bell rings).

Man : We wasted such valuable time arguing !

(Another ring at the door.)

Man : You can rest ... We met as strangers, but we are two of a kind.

(He moves close to her and is about to bend, as if to kiss her, when he hears the voice of his friend, shouting behind the door, 'open the door'. He hurries and opens the door laughing, the Friend slips in and shuts the door behind him.)

Man : You frightened the life out of us, damn you !

Friend : Who is the woman you have ?

Man : You are back to your old jealousy, are you ? Despite the seige around me ? What a big fool you are ! The idea of betraying you never even crossed my mind.

(The Friend looks at the woman, then laughs out loud relieved.)

Friend : I have wronged you with my suspicions.

Man : You're a fool.

Friend : When did this sweetheart arrive ?

Man : She was already here when you first came.

Friend : Why did you hide her from me ?

Man : She's the woman the police are looking for.

Friend : How many drinks has she had ?

Man : I didn't count.

Friend : And is the darling now asleep ?

Man : She's drunk and tired. But how is the siege going ?

Friend : Topsy-turvy, as though it was the end of the world.

Man : While my darling is fast asleep.

Friend : She's quite beautiful. Who is she ?

Man : The same woman for whose sake the world has turned topsy-turvy.

Friend : You're drunk.

Man : A drunken man never lies.
(Pause.)

Friend : If that were true ......

Man : We exchanged vows of eternal love.

Friend : Did you know her before ?

Man : I knew her only an hour ago, or even less, if we go by the Islamic calender.

Friend : What was her crime ?

Man : Something that has turned the world topsy-turvy.

Friend : Was it murder ? A conspiracy ? ...

Man : I asked her, and she confessed her love.

Friend : Do you know her name ? Her family ? Her job ?

Man : She has no name, no family, and no profession.

Friend : Don't you know anything at all about her ?

Man : We knew the most important thing ... that we were going to die in an hour or two.

Friend : You're boring, and quite useless.

Man : We're expecting the police. Don't spoil our waiting.

Friend : There's no way of talking to you. I'm going. Goodbye.
(He moves to go. The bell rings insistently).

Man : At long last.

Friend (agitated) :
What are you going to do ?

Mna : I'll open the door before they break it down.
(Outside the door voices shout : 'Open !', open !'. The Man goes to the door and opens it. Armed policemen rush in, led by an officer. He is not the same officer who came before.)

Officer : Which room overlooks the main road ?
(The Man points at the bedroom, and the officer and his force rush into it and disappear inside.)

Friend : What's the meaning of this ?

Man : I'll be damned if I understand anything of what is going on.

Friend : You'd better wake her up. How can she sleep through all this ?

Man : It's the natural reaction to a combination of exhaustion, anxiety, and too much drink. Let her enjoy her last moments of peace !

(Suddenly, fire-shots are heard inside the bedroom. The shooting continues and grows faster. The two men fling themselves down on their knees in terror.)

Friend : It sounds like a battle.

Man : It is a battle, in the full sense of the word.

Friend : Is the enemy down in the street ?

Man : You said the street was cordoned off.

Friend : Perhaps he's in the opposite building, on the other side of the road.

Man : I don't understand a thing.

Friend : We should leave the flat at once, before we get shot.

(He crawls on all four out of the flat. The officer appears at the bedroom door. He notices the woman for the first time.)

Officer : Was she hit ?

Man : No. She's ... She's sick.

Officer : You'll be in danger if you stay here. Leave at once.

(The Officer withdraws inside the room. The shooting increases all the time. A bullet hits the electric light, and the room is plunged in darkness. The Man, in silhouette, crawls towards the woman, and shakes her to wake her up.)

Man : Wake up ... You have to wake up.
(He shakes her with more force.)

Man : I suppose I'll have to carry you; there's no help for it.

(He carries her in his arms and staggers slowly towards the door.

Man : They did not come to arrest you, or to search the

flat. You're safe my darling. I am safe too. We're both safe. Despair will be something of the past. You're safe now and I am safe and you will be mine forever.

(He leaves with his burden. The shooting continues.)

THE END.

THE MOUNTAIN

— 1 —

(A rocky cave at the top of the Muqqattam mountain. A level foot-path leads to the left end of the entrance. On the right. another path slopes off, supposedly leading to the foot of the mountain.

It is dark inside the cave but we can discern some figures. One of them lights a lamp hanging down from the ceiling. The scene is revealed. A man in local dress sits on the ground to the left ; he is bound hand and foot. Facing him, on the right, five youths sit also on the ground. They are wearing shirts and trousers in the European fashion.

Assaf sits in the middle, acting as leader, with Isma'il and Hilmi on his right, and Ramsy and Husni on his left.)

***Man** (in a state of panic)* :

You leapt on me in the dark as I was going home. I thought you were a bunch of muggers. But now

I recognize you. We live in the same alley. You you are Assaf, and you, Isma'il. You are Hilmi, and this is Ramsy and you are Husni, all neighbours, and sons of neighbours. What is the meaning of this ? Why did you do this to me ?

Assaf : We've brought you here to put you on trial.

Man (surprise mingling with his fright) :
To put me on trial ?

Assaf : Yes.

Man : But I am not a criminal.

Assaf : You are.

Man : And you are not judges.

Assaf : We are yours, as you can see.

Man : If it is money you are after . .

Assaf : *(interrupting)* :
We are not robbers.

Man : Nor am I a criminal.

Assaf : But you are, and you know it.

Man : You are making a mistake my children, I am warning you. The law is very vigilant ; you will never get away with it.

Assaf : Thank you for your advice, but we don't need it.

Man : You are still young. You have your whole life ahead of you, and you are not judges.

Assaf : We have to be, since no one else will stand up for justice.

Man : If you are the judges, where is the defence ?

Assaf : What would be the use of that ?

Your guilt is common knowledge, a by word.

Man : I can see you have already reached your verdict. I can read it clearly in your eyes.

Assaf : Every person you have ever dealt with has already convicted you.

Man : But there are people like me everywhere, in all the markets.

Assaf : They will all follow you here, one by one.

Man : But why blame me ? It's not my fault. Blame it on the times.

Assaf : Your avarice is to blame.

Man : And the penalty for that ?

Assaf : Death.

Man (crying out) :

Death !

Assaf : If you were to go back, it would mean our death ..

Man (pleading) :

I swear to you ...

Assaf (interrupting) :

By your marriage ? You have often done that.

Man : Mercy !

Assaf : Your death is a mercy to humanity.

(They stand up. The man is trembling violently. Four of them carry him out on the left. The fifth picks up five cudgels and follows them.
The man screams throughout.)

Blackout

— 2 —

LIGHTING

(They come back looking grim. A period of gloomy silence. It is broken by Husni who is the worst affected of the five.)

Husni : It is horrible to kill a man. I'll never forget the look in his eyes, or the deathly stillness which spelt the end. We can't know life truly except at the moment of death. To tell you the truth, I feel as if I have died with the man ...
(Pause. Husni dries the sweat off his face.)

Husni : Forgive me. It's my first time ...

Ramsy : It's ours too ...

Assaf (overcoming his gloom) :
Have you broken down already and lost your nerve ?

Ramzy Isma'il and Hilmi (together) :
No ... no ... Of course not.

Assaf (to Husni) :
I feel the way you do, Husni. But we have to control ourselves, and go about it businesslike.

Husni : One would need to have nerves of steel for that, and a dead heart.

Assaf : No. One would only need to remember the injustice, and to trust to the force of habit. We've discussed it long, and we all agreed, to do it, with all our hearts. We took an oath, and can't go back on it. It's our sacred mission, and torment is the fuel of sacred causes ...

Hilmi : It's what we agreed on in full consciousness ...

Assaf : Besides, getting used to injustice is far worse than getting used to murder ...

Husni : Both are equally horrible.

Isma'il : We do it in a good cause ; that's what counts.

Assaf : Always remember that we're kind and honourable men.

Husni : How can we ever smile again !

Assaf : We'll be martyrs ...

Ramsy : We'll be martyrs.

Assaf (assuming a new tone) :
Remember, back in the alley, we forget the mountain

Hilmi : And live like normal people.

Isma'il : And wonder with the others about the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Farghali.

Assaf : And curse all robbers and muggers, and show kindness to his children.

Husni : His children ! They're as much the victims of injustice as we are ...

Assaf (roughly) :

We are the prosecution, not the defence, and if you look at history you'll find that it is nothing but a long river flowing with blood, nine tenths of which is the blood of innocent people.

(Moving to the right)

Always remember that one day our own blood will merge with this innocent blood.

(They leave separately, one after the other.)

Blackout

LIGHTING

(The cave. Assaf sits with Isma'il, Ramsy and Husni)

Assaf : Let us hope Hilmi brings it off.

Isma'il : It was a good idea. The accused is a great womaniser. It will be easy to draw him here with the promise of a good time.

Ramsy : This time, the alley will be shaken to the very core.

Assaf : They'll think it the work of a great murderer.

Ramsy : And won't have a kind word for the executioners.

Isma'il : It's a pity that fear will spread to all and sundry.

Husni : They may soon realize that those who disappear are of a particular kind ...

Assaf : That would be better for our cause.

Husni : But they may start suspecting the wrong people, innocent people.

Assaf : The innocent should fear nothing.

Husni : But they could come to harm.

Assaf : I feel as if you haven't yet recovered from your feebleness.

Husni : I am doing as much as anybody, aren't I ?

Assaf : I meant your heart ; you act and talk, but your heart is not in it.

Ramsy : You can trust him, as much as you trust yourself.

(The sound of someone clearing his throat is heard outside, then Hilmi enters accompanied by a man dressed expensively in the local fashion. The Man is taken aback at the sight of the others and stops in his tracks.)

Man (to Hilmi) :

What's the meaning of this ?

(They tackle him quickly and efficiently, and floor him. They bind his hands and feet together while he struggles to no avail. They seat him in the same place as the previous victim and face him. He looks at them in terror).

Man : What is the meaning of this, my children You couldn't possibly be a band of robbers ...

Hilmi : You are right. You will soon know everything.

Assaf : We are not robbers, just as you said. We are judges who put on trial the criminals of our alley.

Man (terrified) :
Judges ? Trial ? Criminals ?

Assaf : That is right. Mr. Farghali was here before you.

Man : What have you done with him ?

Assaf (pointing left) :
He is buried in the mountain.

Man : Aren't you afraid of the law ?

Assaf : We are the representatives of the supreme law. Defend yaurself.

Man (in a panic) :
Please ... I beg you ... Take what you like ...

Assaf : Defend yourself.

Man (pleading) :
Be patient. Think for a little. I am not unlike any other landlord in Egypt after all, am I ? What is the use of killing me ?

Assaf : The number of the unjust will be less by one.

Man : It is not as simple as that. Think a little, let us discuss it. You are turning yourselves into murderers for nothing.

Assaf : Do you have anything else to say ?

Man : What can I say ? What is there to be said ? The problem will remain ; it is bigger than either you or me. There may be a solution, but it is not certainly murder.

(They stand up. Four carry him out, and the fifth follows with the cudgels.)

Blackout

— 4 —

LIGHTING

(They come back looking grim, but noticably more composed than they were the first time with the exception of Husni. He stands away from them looking very poorly. The other four watch him anxiously, especially Assaf. There is a long pause.)

Assaf : We can't go on like this.
(Another pause.)

Assaf : I wonder when you will get over this weakness of yours.

Husni : I feel peculiar ; perhaps I am sick.

Assaf : No, it's something much worse, and more serious than that.

Husni (in a confessional tone) :

Brother Assaf, I have to admit to you that the man's defence convinced me.

Assaf : Well, well ! It is the man then who is the victim of injustice, and not the citizens of our alley.

Husni : I don't mean that. What I mean is, killing him will not solve the problem ...

Assaf : We have already agreed to the contrary.

Husni (passionately) :
We'll go on from one murder to another until we become hardened professional criminals without realizing it. I have grown sick ...

Assaf : You are truly sick, in your spirit and will power.

Husni (short-temperedly) :
It is the other way round.

Assaf : Really ? Do you mean to say that you are well, and that it is we who are sick ?

(Pause.)

Hilmi : Is that what you mean ?

Ramsy (to Husni) :

What do you suggest ?

Assaf : He simply wants to quit ; is building up to it.

Husni : No, I suggest that we all give up this plan and quit ..

Assaf **: ... Our** criminal profession ?

(Pause.)

Assaf : It is no use going on with this argument now. Step outside for a while, and get a nice breath of fresh night air. Relax and calm down, and then we'll continue our talk.

(Husni hesitates à little, then walks off right. They look at each other.)

Assaf : What do you think ?

Hilmi : He will come back to his senses.

Isma'il : I don't doubt his loyalty.

Assaf : I don't doubt it either. However, weakness has invaded him, and we should beware of the consequences.

Ramsy : Perhaps it will be better for all of us if he quits.

Assaf : It's a solution which could have grave consequences.

Isma'il : But he is not fit to be with us any more.

Assaf : I quite agree. But what do we do next ?

Ramsy : We could relieve him of his duties.

Assaf : And who is to guarantee his silence ?

Ismai'il : No one can dispute his loyalty.

Hilmi : Besides, if we are discovered, he stands to suffer for it as much as we do.

Assaf : But weakness, perhaps even more than strenth, could make a man rash and reckless.

(Pause.)

Isma'il : It's a very remote possibility.

Assaf : Even so. Shall we place our lives and our cause at the mercy of contingencies ?

Ramsy : I have another suggestion, let us confine his work to luring the criminals here.

Assaf : It would make no difference.

Isma'il : We can at least try it. I am not pessimistic ...

Assaf : Let me sound him on the subject.

(Assaf exits in the direction of Husni. The other three remain behind, looking worried and anxious.)

Isma'il : Have patience. I am sure it will turn out well.

Ramsy : Let's hope so.

Hilmi : I feel oppressed as if something terrible is going to happen.

(Assaf returns with slow and heavy steps. He squats down and buries his face between his knees. They look at him anxiously and expectantly.)

Isma'il : What happened ?

(Pause.)

Ramsy : It looks as if you didn't convince him, is that it ?

(Pause.)

Hilmi : Speak Assaf. Don't leave us in this terrible suspense.

(Isma'il goes outside. We hear him drawing in his breath sharply in horror He rushes back angrily towards Assaf.)

Isma'il : You strangled him !

(Ramsy and Hilmi are startled and shaken. They rush outside, then come back looking more shaken and deeply troubled).

Isma'il : Who would have believed it !

Ramsy : That was a unilateral decision. You shouldn't have made it without first consulting us.

Hilmi : We are disintegrating. This is suicide.

Assaf (raising a face contracted with sorrow) :

The pain is tearing at me and wrenching me apart.

Isma'il (sharply) :

A lot of good that will do him ! As if it could bring him back to life !

Assaf : He gave me no choice.

Isma'il : We have always functioned as one unit. Why did you take this decision alone ?

Assaf : To spare you the agony. I took it all on myself.

Isma'il : You've, rather, condemned us to a pain that could never heal.

Assaf : I did it for you, for us, for the cause. My pain and sorrow are crushing me.

Isma'il : You are far more ruthless than I ever imagined.

Assaf : Mercy alone is what moves us.

Isma'il : But how could you ?! How did your hands obey you ?!

(Assaf buries his face in his hands. A pause.)

Blackout

— 5 —

LIGHTING

(Assaf, Isma'il and Hilmi are waiting. Their faces look grave but it seems that the memory of Husni has been swept away by other events.)

Hilmi : The whole alley talks of nothing but the vanished criminal.

Assaf : Great !

Isma'il : My family are beginning to wonder where I spend those nights I stay out till dawn.

Assaf : It's a question frequqently asked in my family too, stirs up a lot of trouble.

Isma'il : It makes me feel sometimes as if I were a hunted man.

Hilmi : I am afraid some people might begin to connect our absences with the disappearance of the victims.

Assaf : We have chosen our course knowing and accepting all the risks.

(Ramsy enters, supporting an aged man by the arm. The man looks surprised at the sight of the young men, and they too show surprise.)

Old Man : Where are we ?

(Ramsy pushes him. He falls. They help each other in tying his hands and feet while he screams and struggles. Then they stand silently over him, looking at each other.

Old Man : You deceived me Ramsy. What do I see ? Who are you ? Thieves ?

Assaf : Let him stay outside until we discuss this.

(They carry him out left and come back.)

Assaf (to Ramsy) :

He is not the man we expected, nor is he one of the condemned.

Ramsy : But he is exactly like them ...

Assaf : What is his crime ?
(Pause.)

Hilmi : The truth is, he managed to become engaged to the girl Ramsy is in love with.

Assaf : How dare you involve us in your private affairs ?

Ramsy : He is an old man, and she is only sixteen. He took advantage of her poverty. Besides, he's lewd and dirty ; he wouldn't have come with me here looking for an orgy if he wasn't.

Assaf : This is a personal question.

Ramsy : No, it's a question of basely taking advantage of the needy.

Assaf : What if the girl has chosen him willingly ?

Hilmi : We have no evidence of his guilt. Besides, it's a purely personal matter ...

Ramsy : It has its public aspect, as I see it.

Assaf : We can't kill a man on such flimsy grounds.

Hilmi : I agree.

Isma'il : And I, too.

Ramsy · Do we let him go then to discover our secret ?

Assaf : Unfortunately we can't do that. He'll have to die, but we will not kill him, for we are not criminals.

Ramsy : You're talking in riddles.

Assaf : Indeed, my words are very clear. You, alone, will kill him, and you, alone, will bury him ...

(Ramsy looks at Isma'il and Hilmi, but they remain silent. He finally picks up a cudgel, and hurries out left.)

Assaf : From now on he will become a criminal.

Hilmi : Yes

Isma'il · And we are his accomplices, if you want to be honest.

Assaf : What ?

Isma'il : An innocent man is being murdered on our suggestion and with our consent. What more do you want ?

Assaf : Do you have a better solution ?

(Isma'il falls silent.)

Assaf (to Hilmi) :

What about you ? Any suggestions ?

Wilmi : No.

Assaf : Isn't there some way we can save our honour ?

Isma'il : No power on earth can save it now.

Assaf : No, there is a way.

Isma'il : really ?

Assaf : To punish the criminal and let the punishment fit the crime.

Isma'il (horrified) :
You mean to kill him as you killed Husni ?

Assaf (mockingly) :
I am only pointing out the way;
you can take it or leave it.

Isma'il : It is more than we can bear.

Assaf : Be criminals then.

Hilmi : Let us forget the whole business.

Assaf : If only we could !

Hilmi : We have to. It is the only way.

Assaf : Weakness is invading us once more, that is what it is.

Isma'il : Life has grown so loathesome !

Hilmi : We have to put this business behind us and go on. Yes, life has become truly loathsome.

Assaf : This crime has stripped us of our honour ...
(Ramsy returns crestfallen, his eyes lowered, and leans agains the wall. There is a long silence).

Blackout.

(Assaf, Isma'il, Hilmi and Ramsy are facing a new victim bound in ropes. At the top of the right footpath, a girl stands outside the cave listening.)

Assaf : The trial is over ... Let us take him out.

(They carry him out in the usual manner. The girl slips inside the cave warily. She looks out left from behind the wall. She screams in horror and faints. The four youths run back in, looking startled, and holding their cudgels. Assaf kneels down beside the girl, while the others run to inspect the right footpath leading into the cave.)

Assaf (genily) :

Heba. my love ... What are you doing here ?

(He pats her cheeks. The others come back.)

Isma'il : There is no one there. How did she come here ?

Assaf (to the girl) :

Heba ... Heba ... Wake up !

Ramsy : What brought her here ?

(The girl gradually comes to. She moves her eyes among the faces around her. She remembers, and jumps to her feet in terror.)

Heba (to Assaf) :

Keep away from me. You are a murderer, you are all murderers !

Assaf : Take it easy, take it easy. We are not murderers. Just calm down. I want to find out if you are all right.

Heba : Don't touch me ... Get away from me.

Assaf : Just take it easy. How did you come here ?

Heba : My luck brought me here, to know you for what you really are, a murderer !

Assaf : I'll explain everything.

Heba : I saw it all with my own eyes ... the killing and the blood.

Assaf : What brought you here, Heba ?

Heba : I was blind. I noticed your staying out night after night ...

I thought ... Anyway, I decided to tail you, and followed you up here.

Assaf : What terrible luck !

Heba : What slaughter ! What blood ! What savagery ! (She turns to leave. Ramsy blocks her way.)

Heba : Let me go.

(The men look at each other.)

Hilmi : That is out of the question.

Isma'il : It goes without saying.

Heba : What are you thinking ?

Ramsy : I am afraid you can't leave. This is the sad truth.

Heba : What do you mean ?

Isma'il : A very sad truth indeed.

Hilmi : What a bloody, filthy game !

Ramsy (to Assaf) :

Speak, Assaf.

(Assaf moans in silence.)

Ramsy : There is no help for it.

Heba : What is it you want of me ?

Ramsy : You will never go back.

Heba (with growing anxiety) : What you mean ?

(She looks at Assaf. He moves closer to her.)

Assaf : Leave this to me.

Ramsy · Meaning ?

Assaf : I need time to think.

Rasm : It is a clear-cut case, or have you forgotten why Husni was killed ?

(Assaf looks at Ramsy, defeated and resentful.)

Ramsy : Speak, Assaf.

Assaf (vehemently) :
No.

Ramsy : No ? What do you mean ?

Assaf : I said no.

Ramsy : Do you want to sacrifice us all for the sake of your sweetheart ?

(Heba draws closer to Assaf.)

Ramsy · She's innocent, and unlucky, but she has to die. (Heba screams in terror.)

Ramsy : You, alone, have to kill her, and you alone have to bury her.

Isma'il : This torture has to stop !

Hilmi : We are doomed !

Ramsy : You will have to do it yourself, Assaf. It is you task.

Heba (to Assaf) :
You will kill me ?

Assaf : No. You will come to no harm.

Ramsy : Do you really mean that ?

Assaf (defiantly) :

That is the way it is.

Ramsy : Now you're showing your real face.

Assaf : She will come to no harm as long as I live.

Ramsy (to the others.) :

Let us take a decision.

Isma'il : Be patient.

Ramsy : Till when ?

Assaf : You can rely on me. It is my problem, and I will soon find the right solution.

Ramsy : The decision we take has to be carried out at once.

Assaf : We'll run away, she and I.

Ramsy : And give up the cause, and desert us ?

Assaf : It is the only way.

Ramsy : There is another : to kill, and bury her yourself. (Looks sharply at Isma'il and Hilmi.)

Ramzy : Speak ! Why do you act as though you were dumb when it is your cue to speak ?

Hilmi : It is clear what we should do.

Isma'il : That is right.

Ramsy : It's a unanimous decision then.

Assaf : Never.

Ramsy : We can relieve you of the execution, and do it ourselves.
(Heba screams, hanging on to Assaf.)

Assaf : That will never happen as long as I live.

Ramsy (attacking him with his cudgel) :
Then, it will happen when you are dead.
(They strike at each other with their cudgels. Ramcy falls dead. Heba runs out to the right. Hilmi follows her carrying his cudgel. Assaf rushes to stop Hilmi, but Isma'il tries to block his way. Assaf kills him and darts out.)

Blackout.

— 7 —

LIGHTING

(Assaf enters, carrying Heba's body in his arms. He places it on the ground, and stands looking down sadly at her.)

Assaf : When pain exceeds all limits, it fails to feel itself ! Therefore, I am calm and happy. I could even sing and dance, only it wouldn't be proper now. Farewell to all things pleasant and unpleasant. And may my happiness assist me in burying my love, my friends, and all my hopes. To any call I shall answer; No. I will neither confess, nor kill myself. For on the face of this mountain, floating in the dark, there is enough space to roam, and lose oneself in drunken madness. Go forth shadow of man, and embrace the emptiness with greater emptiness, and revel in your unsuccoured and aimless defiance. Look forward to the blows of the unknown fate and its many surprises. Enjoy the pain, the mockery, and the memories of all the lost dreams.

The End

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

(The stage is horizontally divided into two areas : the front area which takes up nearly two thirds of the total space is brightly lit and clearly visible ; in the centre of it stands a palm tree, and on one side we see a silent waterwheel. The back area which lies in the shadows is occupied by broad steps resembling the Pharaonic mastabas'; there we dimly detect the silhouttes of recumbent figures suggesting sleep or death. The general character of the stage design is abstract.

The curtain rises- revealing a good-looking young woman pacing up and down between the palm tree and the waterwheel. Her clothes conform to the general abstract character of the set, and are difficult to locate geographically. The same is true of the rest of the cast. The rising of the curtain is accompanied by the loud sounds of a scuffle between two people coming from off stage left. Curses, threats and blows are heard.)

Woman : God in heaven ! Will these sounds never be still ! Will your sun never shine on a tranquil contented earth !

(listens with growing anxiety)

Is it some old sin that I have to expiate ? An affliction inherent in my blood ? or simply errors that we have lacked the honest will to put right !

(A man is flung backwards violently on stage from one wing, and falls unconscious at the foot of the palm tree. The Woman bends over him attentively and pats his cheeks gently. He opens his eyes, looks at her, then closes them once more, murmuring :

Man : Father !

(The woman continues stroking his cheeks. He opens his eyes for a few seconds then closes them murmuring :

Man : Mother !

(She goes on patting his cheeks and he opens his eyes again for a few moments and closes them murmuring :

Man : My wife !

Woman : Bear up.

(She rubs his cheeks and he opens his eyes, coming to and looks at her long and mumbles :

Man : It's you !

Woman : Thank God. Come on, get up, lean on my arm.

(She helps him up, wipes his forehead with a handkerchief, and tidies his hair. He gradually recovers his balance and becomes steady on his feet.

Woman : Are you better now ?

(The man does not answer, but looks his normal self)

Woman : Take a deep breath. It's a fine day today.

Man : Nothing is fine. Nothing at all.

Woman : The weather is, at least. It's all right.

Man : Nothing will ever be right or fine from this day onward.

(She draws him to her fondly)

Woman : Come to me. I don't know the meaning of despair.

(He darts a sharp look at her but withdraws it in shame when he meets her affectionate eyes)

Man : I am in no state to enjoy your kindness. Forgive me.

Woman : If only you could be content to take shelter in my bosom from the troubles of the world !

Man : Would it were possible.

Woman : It is, if you wish it.

Man : (feeling his head and neck in pain)
It's impossible whether I wish it or not.

Woman : It's the ancient curse which pursues the wretched.

Man : Rather the living.

Woman : The living should, therefore, beware of it. I am offering you the only real happiness in the world.

Man : Even happiness could sometimes turn to dust and shame in our hands.

Woman : How ungrateful !

Man : I am not denying our vows. I only fear them, particularly now, in my moment of defeat. From my gory position they look fearfully and blindingly attractive.

Woman : Is this how you feel about the blossoming of the heart, the glowing radiance of the flowers, the time ol picking the fruit ?

Man : No, It is only that I remember with sorrow the madness and its crushing weight, the flabby muscles, and the sagging energies.

Woman · I will say it again, I wish you would take refuge in my bosom from the troubles of the world and be content.

Man : Your beauty is so warm and overpowering ! More irresistible than death itself. But in its warm embrace my dreams have melted away.

Woman : It is far more useful than your dreams.

Man : Cowardice will always remain the bane of man's peace of mind.

Woman : Strange you should long for the harshness of the wilderness !

Man : How I miss the flame of life when it flares and glows on the edge of imminent danger.

Woman : And the blood, the aimless wandering, and the scortching dust ?

Man : Rather say the self-assurance that gives you power over the very direction of the wind.

Woman : And if your foot slips but once, you're dead and buried.

Man : And the loud war cries that send the rats scurrying to their holes. And the thrill of anxiously calculating the chances of life and death.

Woman : And your face, blood stained and terrifying ?

Man : And the heart proudly throbbing at the triumph of right and dignity.

Woman : You are selfish. You have had your fill of me and now you cast me off and hanker after the smell of blood.

Man : I love you, but I loathe grovelling in the dust.

Woman : Which means that you do not love me.

(The man points at the recumbent figures lying on the shadowy steps at the back).

Man : The dead set me an example.

Woman : I hate looking at the dead.

Man : They are not dead as long as we are alive.

Woman : It is all emptiness behind you and ahead of you. There's nothing there. I am the only reality in this world.

Man : Sweet captivating words that have often lulled me to sleep until I was trampled underfoot.

Woman : It was you who kindled his anger with your jests

Man : I thought jesting was an acceptable aspect of human dealings. Why should I be savagely beaten for it then ?

Woman : I often warned you not to overdo it.

Man : When I wished to defend myself, my hands failed me.

Woman : I'd much rather have a courteous man than a thug.

Man : So you said, and I believed it until my hands grew weak and soft.

Woman : I had to save you from a vagrant's homeless life.

Man : And so you did, and he defeated me while ridiculing my frailty.

Woman : Don't let your wounded pride break up our life

Man : Shame will do that, as well as death.

Woman : Nothing is comparable to death.

Man : There are worse things than death.

Woman : No, believe me, death is life's foremost foe.

Man : You'd be happy for me to submit, won't you ?

Woman · Submit to anything but death.

Man : And to resume my former carefree playful existence even though my heart is burning with the shame of defeat ?

Woman : Time heals everything, except death.

Man : (pointing to the 'mastaba'-like steps).
Our ancestors thought differently about death, and were granted immortality.

Woman : They are dead, thoroughly and fully dead.

Man (adddessing the figures in the background)
Say you are immortal.
(A voice from the back echoes 'immortal')

Woman : Don't talk to thin air like a madman.

Man : Can't you hear ?

Woman : You're screaming to the dead to justify the shedding of blood.

Man : What an awesome voice !

Woman : Since when has dust had a voice ?

Man : *(addressing the steps).*

Can you hear what we say ?

(After a while a voice echoes : 'Can you hear what we say)

Man : How did you cope with death, and how did he treat you ?

(A voice echoes his question).

Man (as if to himself, his eyes still on the steps) :

They are echoing me. Yes ! There's a deep meaning there that no intelligent man can miss. There ! They're beginning to move !

(The recumbent figures are completely still throughout)

They are presenting me with an old precious image... See ! The battle is thickening ... Martyrs are falling ! The fighters are scaling the walls of the fortress in swarms like ants. The fortress has surrendered. Hark ! The cries of victory are thundering, piercing the walls of hundreds of years ! (Turning to the woman) Did you see ? Did you hear ?

Woman : There was nothing to see, or hear.

Man : Their triumphant cheers soaring above the bodies of the martyrs have shaken me to the core.

Woman : These are but wild fancies churned by your passion for blood.

Man : Damn the lolling indolence in the rose-arbours.

Woman : Alas for the wisdom of the soft, happy days.

Man (pointing to the steps)

I have felt their scorching breath smouldering with with grief for me.

Woman : The dead have no breath, let alone a scorching one.

Man : If the dead cease to exist, nothing remains alive.

Woman · If you really want to live don't look back.

Man : But to look forward is to look backward.

Woman : And don't look forward.

(The man frowns puzzled and protesting)

Woman : Drown yourself into my eyes. There lies an eternity of life between the darkness of tomorrow and that of yesterday.

(A roar of savage sarcastic laughter is heard off stage left)

Man : Do you hear how he provokes and mocks me ?

Woman : It's only a reckless wind where grief runs riot.

Man : He's challenging me !

Woman : Never mind him. Listen to me. I'll sing you a song that will make the pigeons dance.

Man : Good luck to the pigeons. Let them enjoy it.

Woman : And good luck to you with your blood lust. Have fun with it.

Man : His sneering laugh turns the air in my lungs to dust

Woman : The best thing to do is to stop your ears.

Man : But I was given ears to listen with.

Woman · Listen to my passionats cooing.

Man : And what cooing that has been ! It has aborted my resolution ! Goodbye.

Woman : You can't ever do without me.

Man : Well, you will be a hope I shall put off for later when everything is right.

Woman : Nothing will be right for you if you leave my arms.

(A distant echo of mocking laughter).

Man : Farewell.

Woman : Ignore the noise, and sleep in peace.

Man : No, I have to silence it before I can sleep.

Woman : Just one more word, that I may not despair.

(He Puts his fingers in his ears. She gives him a long look, then withdraws off stage right. The man directs his gaze to the steps at the back).

Man : Only the dead can reveal to me the truth about life. Only the dead.

Echo : The dead.

Man : She's gone. But she won't go far. I can never be totally free of her, nor do I want that. But I need to know the truth.

Echo : The truth.

Man : Speak plainly. Don't talk like rocks.

Echo : Rocks.

Man : Tell me of death and life.

Echo : Life.

Man : What is a hero ?

Echo : Hero.

Man : Is he a warrior ?

Echo : Warrior.

Man : Or a man of peace.

Echo : Peace.

Man : Damn ! Damn ! Damn !

(Turns away from the steps and shouts)
I have to be ready. Call the doctor. Where are you doctor ?

(The doctor enters dressed in the same abstract manner as the man and woman, but wearing a beard and carrying a medical case).

Doctor : Don't shout. It may cause complications.

Man : Why do you talk to me of complications ? How do you know I am sick ?

Doctor : We are usually called to attend the sick, not weddings.

Man : In fact, I think I am sick.

Doctor : These days I put in two days' work into one.

Man : Really !

Doctor : It's the plague.

Man : What plague ?

Doctor : You talk as though you were living in a bottle!

Man : Indeed A bottle of liquid sorrow.

Doctor : It's spreading despite our systematic and technical efforts to contain it.

Man : Perhaps you have made more money out of it than you alreay have.

Doctor : Doctors make money out of common ailments, not plagues.

Man : Isn't a plague one big ailment ?

Doctor : No. A plaque spreads blindly, and threatens our eminent statesmen. So, they rope us all in for the fight, and we get next to nothing for our efforts.

Man : Very unfortunate ! But I suppose we must pay for our neglect of direct and poverty.

Doctor : The plague has come from abroad this time, as it has always done.

Man : Possibly. But it thrives on dirt and poverty.

Doctor : This time it is worse among the rich.

Man : A strange phenomenon. Aught to be studied.

Doctor : But I am sure you didn't summon me here simply to fill you in on the general state of public health.

Man : You're right. Well, I believe am sick.

Doctor : Well ? I am listening.

Man ; No particular symptoms, nothing worth mentioning.

Doctor : You want a general check-up, is that it ?

Man : More or less.

Doctor : What do you mean "more or less" ? Either you want one or you don't want one.

Man : I'm sorry. That is just what I meant.

Doctor · And why didn't you mention "just" what you meant at first ?

Man : Don't pay such close attention to the way I talk.

Doctor · Do you always talk in this hesitant uncertain way ?

Man : More or less.

Doctor : We're back to "more or less", are we ?!

Man : Let's assume the answer is yes.

Doctor : Assume ?! Can't you say what you mean precisely ?

Man : All right. I do want a general check-up.

Doctor : There is something odd and worrying about the way you talk.

Man : We're back to the way I talk, are we ?!

Doctor : It's the first symptom.

Man : Symptom ?!

Doctor : You hedge and dodge, and never head straight for your target.

Man : I beg your pardon ?

Doctor : It's the first symptom of the plague.

Man : The plague !

Doctor : The rest of the symptoms can be easily deduced.

Man : I don't understand you.

Doctor : That is of no account.

Man : But it is my illness.

Ooctor : It's an epidemic. That makes it public property.

Man : Even so, I have to understand it, don't I ?

Doctor : No. You only have to take the cure.

Man : All right then. Tell me about the rest of the symptoms.

Doctor : No. You tell me.

Man : But you've just said that you can predict the rest of the symptoms.

Doctor · Are you presuming to instruct me in how I should treat you ?

Man : I put myself totally in your hands. Do with me as you choose.

Doctor : And here is the second symptom !

Man : Where ?

Doctor : After beating about the push you utter one clear precise sentence : 'Do with me as you choose'.

Man : I was only being courteous.

Doctor : That is what you think, but in fact, it is the second symptom.

Man : In this case any sentence could be taken as a symptom of the plague.

Doctor : This definitely shows that you have no confidence in science.

Man : On the contrary. I am very enthusiastic about science ...

(The doctor shakes his head doubtfully)

Man **: *(pointing to the shadowy steps at the back)*** I come from an old stock renowned for their conquests in the field of science. They were its first champions.

Doctor : Pointing at the dark, coupled with boasting, constitutes the third symptom.

Man : But I'm not one of those who ... I am all for the modern age. I'm fanatical about it.

Doctor : Fanatical ?!

Man : What I mean is, I am so enthusiastic about it. I only turn to my ancestors in moments of stress, when I absolutely have to.

Doctor : And this too is another symptom of the plague.

Man : What sort of behaviour then do you regard as healthy ?

Doctor : As far as I can see, you haven't the first idea about it.

Man : I feel dizzy.

Doctor : Honesty makes you dizzy, does it ? The fifth symptom.

Man : Perhaps I exaggerated a bit.

Doctor : Dizziness followed by exaggeration. The sixth symptom.

Man : I think I'd better hold my tongue.

Doctor : Dizziness followed by exaggeration followed by silence. The seventh symptom.

Man : Ha ... Ha ... Ha ...

Doctor : Dizziness. Exaggeration. Silence. Uncontrollable laughter. The eighth symptom.

Man : Ha ... Ha ... Ha ... Ha ...

Doctor : Laughter grows worse upon confirmation of the symtoms of infection. The ninth symptom.
(The man buries his face in his hands)

Doctor : You may hide your face, but the symptoms won't go away.

Man : *What can I do* ?

Doctor : And this question is the symptom most serious of all.

Man : Do you know what I think ? You're not really diagnosing something that I have. You're simply trying to prove that there is a plague.

Doctor : Now you're attacking me ! This shows that you cower in the face of aggression and turn belligerent in response to kindness. This is definifely the tenth symptom.

Man : You're beginning to make me angry.

Doctor : Anger when tolerance is indicated is the eleventh symptom.

Man : (Sarcastically) Tralala ... La ... Li ... La ... Bum...

Doctor : Now you're raving. The twelfth symptom.

Man : Tell me Doctor, have you ever treated an important influential person of this plague ?

Doctor : Indeed I have..

Man : And were you as honest with him about the symptoms as you are with me now ?

Doctor : Of course not .

Man : What did you do then ?

Doctor : I ignored the symptoms that might offend him.

Man : Wasn't this putting his life in danger ?

Doctor : It's better any way than putting *my* life in danger.

Man : Wouldn't you say that was a symptom of the pla gue ?

Doctor : I would.

Man : So, you're infected too.

Doctor : That goes without saying. None of us has escaped.

Man : Are you getting any treatment ?

Doctor : The same treatment I'll prescribe for you.

Man : What is it ?

Doctor : The one and only cure is this : walk on your hands, not your feet ; listen with your eyes; see with your ears ; remember with your mind ; and reason with your memory.

Man : What a strange and difficult cure !

Doctor : But it is effective. It has been tested and proven.

Man : I thank you.

Doctor : Not at all. It's time for me to go.

Man : And may you fare well.

(The doctor makes for the left wing of the stage from whence the loud sarcastic laughter suddenly erupts. He stops in his tracks, turns round and disappears where he came from.)

Man : It's time that abhorrent voice were silent. And the only way is to make him pay for his insolence.

Voice : *(Coming from stage right)*

There is another way.

(A man of gigantic proportions enters from the right. He looks thoroughly confident and self-possessed, and smiles aimably.)

Man : Who are you ?

Giant : A friend.

Man : I don't know you.

Giant : We live in a world where we only know our enemies.

Man : But I have never seen you before.

Giant : You see me now. Isn't that enough ?

Man : God give me strength. I give up.

Giant : Remember this moment well, for it dates the dawn of the age of happiness in your life.

Man : What *do* you want ?

Giant : To help you ?

Man : In what respect ?

Giant : To conquer your enemy.

Man : I never asked for anyone's help.

Giant : Doesn't my unprompted offer make me all the more worthy of your friendship ?

Man : Who sent you ?

Giant : Let's say Providence.

Man : That is no answer. It's too general, too vague.

Giant : Well, then you may say that I came because it was my job to come.

Man : And what is that job ?

Giant : To hold the balance of justice.

Man : Who appointed you in that position ?

Giant : I myself. A man chooses the position most suited to his abilities.

Man : But I never asked you for help.

Giant : Perhaps because you never knew I was at hand, and perhaps ...

Man : Yes ?

Giant : Because you always overestimate your strength.

Man : That's my business any way.

Giant : Is it?

Man : Isn't it ?

Giant : No. It's part of my job to save you, even from yourself.

Man : I thank you. Truly. But please don't overstretch Your duties. The matter is simple. An insolent man assaulted me and I have to punish him myself.

Giant : But he's much stronger than you are. Only I can stand up to him.

Man : I do not need your help.

Giant : But you do, most desperately.

Man : I thank you for your offer once more. But I really don't know you at all. It is not as if we were real kinsmen.

Giant : But we are. I am an integral part of this place.

I have a living here, and relatives. My family has old ties of friendship with your ancestors.

Man : My ancestors ? I doubt it.

Giant : Why do you doubt it ?

Man : Because I happen to know everyone they knew or had connections with.

Giant : You can't know them all. You must have missed a few. My family was of those few.

Man : Even so, that does not necessarily oblige me to accept your help.

Giant : There is no question of obligation here. I referred to the past only by way of recommendation..

Man : There is no obligation then ?

Giant : Not on the personal level. But in my official capacity ...

Man : I will not be coerced ....

Giant : It's extraordinary that you should so obstinately turn down what is practically a godsend.

Man : I am the one who received the blow, and I am the one who must pay it back.

Giant : You can't do it alone.

Man : That's nothing to you.

Giant : It's everything to me. It is my job in life.

Man : That's none of my business.

Giant : Don't make me doubt your sanity.

Man : Please go. Leave me alone. I will do as I choose.

Giant : Think. Think long and hard before you turn down the gift of Providence.

Man : I am the one who received the blow, and I am the one who must pay it back.

(The woman appears and stands between the two men. The Giant acknowledges her presence with a nod and she returns his greeting)

Giant : I am deeply honoured to meet the mistress of the house.

Woman : Thank you sir.

Giant : I was trying to remind him of the old ties between my family and his ancestors.

Woman : I heard everything.

Giant : He is denying them.

Woman : We can't deny any ties, old or new.

Giant : Hooray for the voice of wisdom !

Woman : Be gentle with him. He's very upset.

Giant : I am only trying to do my job. Is that wrong ?

Woman : No. Blessed be the job that helps to safeguard life.

Giant : Hooray for the voice of wisdom !

Man (to the Woman) : Is this a conspiracy ?

Woman : God forbid.

Man : It is a conspiracy.

Woman : Open your heart to him.

Giant : I thank you, voice of reason.

Man : (to the Woman)
I ask you to respect me.

Woman : I love and respect you with all my heart.

Giant : Why do you always cross the people who love you?

Man : Love, sometimes, can kill.

Woman : Love has no dealings with death, only with life.

Man : Will you leave us alone.

Giant : How could you be so rude to someone so wise and so beautiful.

Man : Don't interfere in my private affairs.

Giant : Your wish is my command.

Woman : I'll go if you wish. But please, I implore you, Don't shut your heart against him.

(She exits. A pause during which the two men eye each other, the giant smilingly, the man angrily.)

Giant : Now we can talk.

Man : I thought we had finished.

Giant : Not yet. Listen to me with an open mind, and then make your decision.

Man : *(Heaves an impatient sigh but remains silent.)*

Giant : I want to help you.

Man : And what do you expect in return ? Tell me honestly.

Giant : I am a friend, not a dealer.

Man : You are after something, aren't you ? What is it ? Tell me.

Giant : I ask nothing.

Man : Nothing at all ?

Giant : Only what is necessary to accomplish the task.

Man : Such as what ?

Giant : In order to chastize your enemy we have to flush him out and lure him here.

Man : To my place ?

Giant : Yes.

Man : And let him desecrate my home with his dirty feet.

Giant : A place is but a place. Don't invest it with too many meanings.

Men : *(pointing to the 'mastabas' at the back)*

It was the home of my ancestors, and has been mine ever since.

Giant : They are dead. Don't give them undue importance.

Man : So, that's what you think of one's ancestors.

Giant : The earth is full of skeletons and bones. Could you tell which ones are your forefathers' ?

Man : Only a person with no roots could say that.

Giant : Don't lose your temper. I only meant to explain to you my plan of work.

Man : Why don't you seek him there, where he sits and laughs ?

Giant : I know what I am after.

Man : All right, I'll go along with you. Supposing I agree, will you set to work at once ?

Giant : But that is not all. There's something else.

Man : More conditions ?

Giant : Don't use that detestable word. It's so inappropriate in the context of friendship.

Man : All right. What else do you require ?

Giant : While I'm preparing for the battle I need special care.

Man : Such as what ?

Giant : You have to give me food and drink and the necessary entertainment.

Man : Fine. But I don't think that's all, is it ?

Giant : It would really be delightful if you asked the girl to come and keep us company.

Man : My girl ?

Giant : She has such a big heart. I'm sure she can accommodate both of us.

Man : Why not our enemy too ?

Giant : I only meant to say that I needed affection while warming up for the battle.

Man : And what else ?

Giant : Since I'll be at hand whenever you need me, and be your arm, so to speak, it's only fair that you shouldn't get involved in anything before first consulting me.

Man : Sounds logical !

Giant : Nor should you befriend onyone without my consent. He may turn out to be my enemy.

Man : One plus one equals two !

Giant : Nor should you antagonize anyone before referring to me first. He may turn out to be my friend.

Man : Can anyone object to that ?

Giant : Shall we set about it then ?

Man : There's only one question I'd like to ask you. What more can my enemy do to me than that ?

Giant : (objecting)
I beg your pardon. It's not the deed that counts, but who does it !

Man : Meaning ?

Giant : A kiss from your wife is not the same as a kiss from a whore ; and being slapped by your father is certainly very different from having your face slapped by a stranger.

Man : And you see yourself in the same position to me as both my wife and my father, is that it ?

Giant : I think we're beginning to understand each other.

Man : (furious)
Get out of my sight.

Giant : What's come over you ?

Man : Go away. Go at once.

Giant : Where should I go ?

Man : Get out of my place.

Giant : It's my place too, you know.

Man : What did you say ? !

Giant : My dear sir, we've spent such a long time here talking. Surely this gives me the right to stay. Besides your wise girl and I have developed such a deep human relationship.

Indeed, the same has happened with your ancestors themselves ...

Man : You're nothing but a thug ...

Giant : May God forgive you.

Man : Go away I don't want your help. I'll fight my enemy single-handed.

Giant : It'll be two against one in this case.

Man : How ?

Giant : You're making me into your enemy. I'll have to defend myself.

Man : You mean you will fight me because I refuse your help ?

Giant : No. But because you want to drive me out of my place and obstruct my most essential function in life.

Man : Don't take me so lightly. I may not be a giant. but I'll fight even death itself.

Giant : If death is what you want, death you shall have.

Man : If I die, I shall die fighting.

Giant : Let's fight then, that you may die.

(The woman rushes in)

Woman : I asked you to open your heart to the voice of reason, not to the call of death.

Man : He is worse than the other.

Giant : He is a fool.

Man : He is the same as the other, only worse.

Woman : Alas Alas !

Man : We can never have a good life as long as they exist.

Woman : Where are all the pretty words gone ? will I ever hear them again ?

Man : Only when they and their kind disappear.

Woman : The same old words.

Man : They are true all the same.

Woman : I want to hear a beautiful word for a change.

Giant : I keep on saying this cherished word, but who listens ?

Woman : *(to the Giant)*

Can't you restore the balance of justice without making conditions ?

Giant : I hate that word.

Woman : Well, can't you restore the balance of justice without making demands ?

Giant : But that wouldn't be just or fair ...
(The sound of the sarcastic laughter rings in the distance)

Giant : Heavens ! ... I know that voice !

Woman : It's his enemy.

Giant : His enemy !

Woman : Yes.

Giant : What a strange coincidence !

Woman : It's the man you offered to help us overcome.

Giant : Ha ... Ha ... Ha ...

Woman : What's there to laugh about ?

Giant : He's a cousin of mine, on my mother's side.

Woman : A cousin of yours ?

Giant : Yes. Ah, the beautiful childhood memories ! Quite unforgettable !

Man : I thought you knew the man you offered to beat.

Giant : Ha ... Ha ... Ha ...

Man : Do you still think you ought to help me ?

Giant : But you refused my help.

Man : Supposing I were to accept it now, would you still give it ?

Giant : You accept all my conditions ?

Man : I thought you hated the word 'conditions'.

Giant : Yes or no ?

Man : Yes.

Giant : In this case I shall play the messenger of peace between you two.

Man : The messenger of peace ?!

Giant : For the sake of this wise woman, and yours as well.

Man : And your earlier pledges ?

Giant : There are the rights of kinship to consider. I believe that by taking this position I give them their full due.

Man : But he was the aggressor.

Giant : Even so.

Man : And was no more than a bandit originally.

Giant : Even so.

Man : He is a cursed monster.

Giant : You don't know him as he really is.

Man : Haven't you heard his mocking laughter ?

Giant : It is only his way of being playfull. What a light-hearted humorous lad !

Man : But I know him ,I really do. I've dealt with him, talked with him, fought with him. I know him.

Giant : Believe me, he only reveals the secret treasures of his naturet to those who love and understand him.

Man : On the contrary, he's only docile when beaten and chastised.

Giant : I am so glad you didn't get a chance to beat him.

Man : Why ?

Giant : I would have had to come to his rescue.

Man : You're threatening me, aren't you ?

Giant : There are the rights of kinship to consider.

Man : It's all so clear now. You are nothing but a bully, just like your cousin.

Giant : This way of thinking could be fatal.

Man : You're only wasting my time.

Giant : You can do what you like with your time.

Man : I'll settle my account myself.

Giant : You know very well you're talking nonsense. You already know my job and why I'm here.

Man : Damn you !

Giant : I am your friend whether you like it or not, and

he is my kinsman whether you accept it or not. And since I am older than both of you, and stronger, I find it my duty to bind the three of us in a covenant of permanent friendship and amity worthy of this place, which has always fathered the brotherhood of the living and the very dead.

Man : Nice words . But the intent is deceit and oppression.

Giant : *(To the woman)*
You speak.

Woman : I have nothing more to say.

Giant : Admit that I am right.

Woman : I only admit that love is all I care for in this world.

Giant : How wise you are !

Woman : Love is endless giving, a complete surrender.

Man : Monsters only take, they never give.

Woman : If only you would believe in love.

Man : Love cannot survive among monsters.

Woman : Love is the most powerful force in this world, but as a weapon it only yields to those who believe in it.

Man : Monsters speak a different language.

Woman : I am afraid you may turn into one yourself.

Man : Human dignity is more important than life itself.

Woman : True virtue is the fruit of love.

Giant : *(To the Man)*

It's very sad that you should love death more than you love this beautiful wise woman.

Man : I'd much rather die than submit to your will.

(Sounds of sarcastic laughter in the distance)

Giant : What a humorous boy ! As fond of humour as he is of peace.

Man : He's as cunning as you're strong.

Giant : Ahead of you lie two giants. Behind you a good life awaits you.

Why don't you turn back.

Man : I'll go forward.

Giant : *(To the Woman)*

I suggest we leave him alone to think things over quietly. Arguing seems to make him more headstrong and obstinate. (The Giant and the Woman exit separately through two doors on the right. The Man ponders for a while, then looks back at the 'mastabas' lying in the shadows).

Man : It's time you spoke.

Echo : You spoke.

(He waves his hand at them angrily, and paces up

and down deep in thought. A blind man enters, feeling his way with a stick ; he bends his head in the direction of the man, straining his ears).

Beggar : Anyone there ?

Man : Yes

Beggar : Was it you who called me ?

Man : No.

Beggar : It was your voice. My ears never deceive me.

Man : What do you want ?

Beggar : What do *you* want ?

Man : Aren't you a beggar ?

Beggar : I am.

Man : Is it alms you want ?

Beggar : I have collected enough for today. What about you ? What do you want ?

Man : Nothing.

Beggar : Liar.

Man : A beggar, and insolent too !

Beggar : Why abuse me ?

Man : How dare you call me a liar ?

Beggar : Because you are.

(The man raises his hand and makes to hit him but abstains in the face of the man's helplessness)

Man : Go before I amash your head.

Begar : I won't go before I know why you called me and what you wanted of me.

Man : Go or else ...

Beggar : Not before I know what you want.

Man : *(Sarcastically)*
Have you anything to give ?

Beggar : Ask and thou shalt be answered.

Man : *(Laughs involuntarily)*
I owe you my first laugh this day.

Beggar : It's nothing, I have much more to give.

Man : It seems you're rich.

Beggar : Very.

Man : What do you own ?

Beggar : The endless world of darkness.

Man : You're very amusing despite your insolence, and funny. You would have done better to have found yourself a place in some institiution.

Beggar : I joined a home once.

Man : Why did you leave ?

Beggar : I was expelled.

Man : *(Laughing)*

This is the first time I hear of a beggar expelled !

Beggar : The head of the institution was rough and rude, and a shameless thief to boot.

Man : And nevertheless, he expected you to sing his praises ?

Beggar : Some of the inmates rebelled. I was at the head of the mutiny.

Man : And so you opted for the life of a tramp.

Beggar : I have.

Ban : But wasn't the institution with all its faults better than this beggarly vagrant existence ?

Beggar : Freedom is better than security itself.

Man : You strike me as a very well-informed beggar !

Beggar : I know a lot of things.

Man : For instance ?

Beggar : I see with my ears.

Man : What else ?

Beggar : And walk on my hands.

Man : You see with your ears and walk on your hand ?!

Beggar : It so happened that in my wanderings I came

across some government officials who led me back to the institution and put me there once more.

Man : They delivered you to the monster ?

Beggar : No. A new head had replaced him. He was honest, just, and kind ...

Man : How come you left it then ?

Beggar : I bolted.

Man : Incredible.

Beggar : You see, it's true he was honest, fair, and kind, but he was also too damned fond of discipline. Almost an obsession with him. And he enforced it with near astronomical precision, and no questions asked.

Man : But you enjoyed the food, the clothes, the comfort, and the cleanliness.

Beggar : You ate according to schedule, drank, according to schedule, went to the toilet, begging your pardon, according to scedule, and slept according to schedule. I nearly went mad.

Man : And so you rebelled once more.

Beggar : Even the luxury of rebelling was denied me, for how could I rebel against an honest, just, and kind man ? My conscience wouldn't let me.

Man : You should have been contented with your lot.

Beggar : Even when revolting was denied me ?

Man : Revolting for its own sake is not particularly a good thing.

Beggar : It's better than being a stone anyway.

Man : And so you ran away.

Beggar : And so I ran away.

Man : To the dust, the insects, and the rotten morsel.

Beggar : To my true happiness.

Man : Your story is strange and exciting.

Beggar : Goodbye.

(Starts to go)

Man : Wait ...

(The Beggar walks away)

Man : Don't you want to hear me ?

(Beggar exits, the Giant and Woman enter)

Woman : I feel for you in your sorrow.

Giant : I hope you have come round to my point of view.

Man : Look here Mr. evil-lover who sometimes enlists good in the service of evil, and you lady do-gooder who is not above using evil means in the interests of good, to you both I declare my final decision : I'll fight for my dignity till death.

(The Woman buries her face in her hands and remains in that position till just before the end).

Giant : The slogan of the plague which has milled millions of fools.

Man : The true springs of life are in danger of drying up. The immortal longings of the heart are haggled over and bartered for nothing. Damn that dreary loneliness in which meaning withers and things lose their sense. I am going ...

(The sarcastic laughter swells.

The Man turns round and advances intently towards it. The Giant leaps at him. The Man pushes him away. The Giant holds him by the shoulders and flings him in the direction of the 'mastabas'. The Man disappears in the shadows for a moment then springs back like a ball that had hit a wall; He falls headlong on his face, then stands up swaying.

It appears as if his movement has woken up the sleeping figures and drawn them out of their inertia. The first rolls down the steps until he reaches the front of the stage and pulls himself up slowly and heavily like someone waking up. Another follows, repeating the same movement sequence, and he is followed by many others, male and female, all repeating the same movements until the stage fills with them.

The Giant retreats slowly until he disappears in the direction of the mocking laughter, stage left.

The sleepers are now fully awake, they hold themselves up straight, and their faces wear a determined look. The whole scene is conducted in mime. The Man marches in the direction of his enemy with firm rhythmical steps. The rest march behind him resolutely until all disappear, and only the sound of their steps is heard.

The woman removes her hands from her face, listens sadly, then looks far away)

The End

مطابع الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب

رقم الايداع بدار الكتب ١٩٨٩/٢٣٧١

ISBN ـ ٩٧٧ ـ ٠١ ـ ٢٠٧٣ ـ ١